

NEHEMIAH

INTRODUCTION

The use of the first person pronoun in [Nehemiah 1:1](#) gives the impression that Nehemiah was the writer. If Ezra was the writer, he was copying from the journal of Nehemiah. This book, as was true in the Book of Ezra, has copies of letters, decrees, registers, and other documents. The same man wrote both books. The writer perhaps was Ezra. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are one in the Hebrew canon. Nehemiah was a layman; Ezra was a priest. In the Book of Ezra the emphasis is upon the rebuilding of the temple; in the Book of Nehemiah the emphasis is upon the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. In Ezra we have the religious aspect of the return; in Nehemiah we have the political aspect of the return. Ezra is a fine representative of the priest and scribe. Nehemiah is a noble representative of the businessman. Nehemiah had an important office in the court of the powerful Persian king, Artaxerxes, but his heart was with God's people and God's program in Jerusalem. The personal note is the main characteristic of the book. I find myself coming to this book again and again because of the kind of book that it is.

Chronologically this is the last of the historical books. We have come to the end of the line as far as time is concerned. As far as the Jews are concerned, the Old Testament goes no further with their history. The Book of Ezra picks up the thread of the story about seventy years after 2 Chronicles. The seventy years of captivity are over and a remnant returns to the land of Israel. The return under Ezra took place about seventy-five years after the return of Zerubbabel. Nehemiah returned about fifteen years after Ezra. These figures are approximate and are given to show the stages in the history of Israel after the Captivity. This enables us to see how the "seventy weeks" of Daniel fit into the picture in a normal and reasonable way. The "seventy weeks" of Daniel begin with the Book of Nehemiah (not with Ezra) ". . . from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks . . ." The background of the events in Nehemiah is ". . . the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times" ([Dan. 9:25](#)).

The following dates, suggested by Sir Robert Anderson, seem to be a satisfactory solution to the problem of the "seventy weeks" of Daniel:

Decree of Cyrus, 536 B.C. -- [Ezra 1:1-4](#).

Decree of Artaxerxes, 445 B.C. (twentieth year of his reign) -- [Nehemiah 2:1-8](#). "Seventy weeks" begin.

The first "seven weeks" end, 397 B.C. -- Malachi. (For details see Sir Robert Anderson's *The Coming Prince*.)

The word so occurs thirty-two times. It denotes a man of action and few words. Mark this word in your Bible and notice how this ordinarily unimportant word stands out in this book.

The key verses for this book are: (1) "And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of

heaven" ([Neh. 1:4](#)) and (2) "And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" ([Neh. 6:3](#)).

Outline

I. Rebuilding the Walls, [Neh. 1](#) through [Neh 7](#)

- A. Nehemiah's Prayer for the Remnant at Jerusalem, [Neh. 1](#)
- B. Nehemiah's Request of the King; Return to Jerusalem; Review of the Ruins of Jerusalem, [Neh. 2:1-16](#)
- C. Nehemiah's Encouragement to Rebuild the Walls, [Neh. 2:17-20](#)
- D. Rebuilding the Walls and the Gates, [Neh. 3](#)
- E. Nehemiah's Response to Opposition, [Neh. 4](#) through [Neh. 6](#)
(Wall completed, [Neh. 6:15](#))
- F. Nehemiah's Register of People, [Neh. 7](#)

II. Revival and Reform, [Neh. 8](#) through [Neh. 13](#)

- A. Great Bible Reading Led by Ezra, Chapter 8
- B. Revival -- the Result, [Neh. 9](#) through [Neh. 10](#)
- C. Reform -- Another Result, [Neh. 11](#) through [Neh. 13](#)

Chapter 1

THEME: Nehemiah's prayer for the remnant at Jerusalem

God's chosen people were called to witness against idolatry, but too often they themselves succumbed and became idolaters. God sent them to Babylon, the fountainhead of idolatry, to take the "gold cure." They returned repudiating idolatry. Their restoration was incomplete, however. They were not free from this time on until the time of the Roman Empire. The New Testament opened with them under the rule of Rome.

Three men played important roles in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. There was Zerubbabel, the prince, who represented the political side. Then there was Ezra, the priest, and finally Nehemiah, the layman. The king, the priest, and the prophet actually failed to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and cleanse the temple, so God raised up Nehemiah, whom we designate a layman. Frankly, it is an unfortunate distinction today to talk about the clergy and the layman. One is half of the other. We need both.

I started out in the ministry wearing a Prince Albert coat, a winged collar, and a derby hat. One of my friends told me that when I stood behind the pulpit on Sunday morning in my white collar and white shirt, I looked like a mule looking over a whitewashed fence! Then one day, as a young preacher, the realization came to me that I was no different from the men sitting in the pews. I took off all of that garb and wore what the other men were wearing.

I was playing golf one day with some friends. One of the men invited a friend who was an officer in a church. He apparently did not know I was coming. When he saw me, he

said, "Oh, my, Dr. McGee is here. Now we are going to have to watch our language." Well, do you know what I did? I called his hand in a hurry. I said, "Now listen, brother. I am no different than you are. If you want to cuss, you cuss. But let us understand one thing: whether I am here or not, God hears your language. It does not make any difference whether I hear what you say, or not." There is a false distinction being made today between the clergy and the laity. It is equally important that both of them be in fellowship with God.

It was a layman, though, who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and cleansed the temple. I believe that even in this day God can and will raise up a layman to do a great work and put His work on a sure foundation. And it needs rebuilding today. Candidly, I am looking to God to raise up a young man who will not be a product of our seminaries. I have no objection to seminary graduates, but from time to time God raises up men who do not have that background -- men like Dwight L. Moody, Billy Sunday, and Billy Graham. We need men like Nehemiah.

Nehemiah believed in watching and working. He also believed in working and praying. Watch and pray, or work and pray, are the words that characterize this man. He had a good government job in Persia. He was cupbearer to the king. He was a good, moral, honest man. He could have remained in Persia, but if he had, he would not have been in the record of God. We would never have heard of him. I want you to notice some of the things that mark out this man as we get acquainted with him. Let me introduce you to Nehemiah, the loyal layman.

Nehemiah's Concern For The Remnant At Jerusalem (1:1-3)

The first seven chapters of this book deal with the rebuilding of the walls. The rest of the book deals with revival and reform. The first chapter begins with Nehemiah's prayer.

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace.

That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem [[Neh. 1:1-2](#)].

When Nehemiah speaks of "Jews that had escaped," he is referring to those Jews who had returned to the land. Nehemiah could have returned to the land, but for some reason he did not. He took a job instead. I am not going to criticize him because God uses men like this, and He used Nehemiah.

Notice that this man with an important position had a concern for God's work. He was deeply concerned about God's cause. One day while he was busy going back and forth in the palace, he saw one of his brethren who had just arrived from Jerusalem, who was probably bringing with him a message to the palace. Nehemiah stopped him and asked, "How are things going in the land?" This is the word he received:

And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall

of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire [[Neh. 1:3](#)].

That is not a very pretty picture. What a pitiful spectacle was God's cause and His people! The Jews were in disrepute because they had failed, and God could not afford to let that happen. Unfortunately, we cannot afford to let it happen today either. Nehemiah became extremely concerned about this report, and there are several things he could have said in reply. He could have said, "It's too bad, brethren. Sorry to hear it. I'll put you on my prayer list. God bless you." There are other pious platitudes and Christian clichés he could have given, but he probably did not know about them. The important thing is that Nehemiah was concerned.

Nehemiah's Prayer (1:4-11)

And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven [[Neh. 1:4](#)].

There are several things I would like to call to your attention in this particular verse. Nehemiah was not indifferent to the sad plight of the people, and neither was he a carping critic. He could have said, "The people should have done this, or they should have done that." Nehemiah was concerned. Looking back at the Book of Ezra, do you remember his reaction to the condition of the people? He was a priest and he, too, was concerned. Now here is a layman who is concerned.

Today the cause of Christ is in jeopardy. I wonder if those who criticize and pretend to be interested are really concerned. If the thing you are criticizing doesn't break your heart, stop it! There is too much talk and not enough tears. You are not God's messenger if the message doesn't cause you personal anguish.

While I think that Ezra was an older man, I believe Nehemiah was a younger man. Ezra was probably a little boy at the time of the Captivity, but it is my opinion that Nehemiah had been born in captivity; as had many others. This is the reason, when we were studying Ezra, that I did not criticize these people for remaining in Babylon. Although they were out of the will of God, there were some very godly people who did not return to the land. The apostle Paul tells us in [Romans 14:4](#), "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth . . ." You and I have no right to judge these people. Always we ought to be careful in judging other believers when we do not know all of the circumstances.

He "sat down and wept" -- Nehemiah was on state business, but that did not keep him from sitting down and weeping. Notice that he "mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed." This was the resource and the recourse of these men. That is what Ezra did, and now also Nehemiah weeps and prays.

Once again I must call your attention to the expression "God of heaven." This expression occurs in the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel. It is a designation of God which is peculiar to these three books. After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Jerusalem, God could no longer be identified with the temple as the One who dwelt between the cherubim. The glory had departed. "Ichabod" was written over the escutcheon of Israel.

The Lord God had returned to heaven. For this reason in the postcaptivity books He is "the LORD God of heaven." He did not appear again until one time in Bethlehem when the angel said, "Glory to God in the highest" ([Luke 2:14](#)). Christ had come to earth veiled in human flesh. Someday He is coming again. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said, "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" ([Matt. 24:30](#)). I don't know what that sign is, but I rather suspect it is the Shekinah glory of God coming back. However, in Nehemiah's day He is God of heaven, and Nehemiah addresses Him in this way.

This is a great prayer, and there will be another in chapter 9.

And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments [[Neh. 1:5](#)].

Let's pause here just a moment and consider the word terrible. It is a word that has been greatly misunderstood and abused. Really and truly, preachers should not be called Reverend because it means "terrible." Well, perhaps I am wrong; maybe some of us should be called "The Terrible Mr. So-and-So." Seriously, Reverend is a word that should only be applied to God. Someone has expressed it this way:

"Call me Mister, call me friend,
A loving ear to all I lend,
But do not my soul with anguish rend,
PLEASE stop calling me Reverend."
-- Author unknown

Reverend was a title given to ministers in the old days when they were held in high regard in the community. That is no longer true, of course. In fact, it is not even true in the church today. There are some people who claim their church is different, but in most churches there is a small group who try to crucify the preacher. However, in the old days when a preacher was called Reverend, it was a term of respect, although it was a misnomer. Today I can almost always detect an unsaved man by the way he addresses me. Years ago, when I used to go to a dry cleaning establishment, the young fellow who operated it always called me "Reverend." From the time I walked into his establishment until the time I walked out, he used that term at least twenty times. He really wore it out. He was an unsaved man. He paid little attention to what I was saying when I witnessed to him, but he liked to use the title of Reverend.

God is the reverend God, the One who incites terror. But He is also the God "who keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love and observe his commandments." He is a God of judgment, but He is also a gracious God.

Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned [[Neh. 1:6](#)].

Notice Nehemiah's wording in this prayer. Does he say, "I come to confess the sins which they have sinned?" No. He confessed the sins "which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned." Now this man nails it down: "I am a sinner. My father's house has sinned. The nation has sinned." How many times do we hear that kind of a confession of sin in our churches?

In his prayer Nehemiah made a confession: the failure of the Jews was because of sin. Nehemiah said, "Both I and my father's house have sinned." This man was no self-righteous Pharisaic onlooker.

We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses [[Neh. 1:7](#)].

We can see from this verse that Nehemiah believed God's Word. He rested in it. And he knew God's Word. He was concerned because God's commandments were ignored.

Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations [[Neh. 1:8](#)].

Nehemiah not only believed God's Word, he also believed in the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. There are a lot of preachers who do not believe that today, which may be the reason God sometimes has to use laymen. God's truth cannot always penetrate those of us who are preachers, but He can sometimes reach a layman.

But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them: though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there [[Neh. 1:9](#)].

Nehemiah said to the Lord, "You said that You would scatter us if we disobeyed You, and we have disobeyed. You also said that if we turned and came back to You, that even though we be 'cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven,' You would bring us back to the land." Nehemiah believed that the Jews would return to the land. He counted on it and that is why he prayed this way.

Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand.

O LORD, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer [[Neh. 1:10-11](#)].

Nehemiah is willing and wants to be used of God. But he is not running ahead of God; he prays about it. He says, "If You want to use me, I am making myself available." When Nehemiah spoke about the king in his prayer, he called him "this man." We will see him going to ask the king if he may return to the land. Nehemiah does not want to run ahead of God, and so he goes to Him first in prayer.

Chapter 2

THEME: Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem

Nehemiah's Request To Return To Jerusalem (2:1-8)

In this chapter we see that Nehemiah requests permission from the king and returns to Jerusalem. He reviews the ruins of the city and encourages the people to build the walls.

And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence [[Neh. 2:1](#)].

Notice it is at this particular point where the "seventy weeks" of Daniel begin: "in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king." This is an important date in prophecy.

This man Nehemiah is a delightful fellow, as we are going to see. I would have loved to have known him. He is the kind of a layman that you want to get acquainted with. He has a political job -- that of cupbearer to the king. His function is to taste anything brought to the king. For example, if a glass of wine is brought to the king, Nehemiah tastes it first. If he suffers no ill effects, then the king will drink the wine. His job as cupbearer is dangerous, as you can see.

The job of cupbearer demanded that Nehemiah be in the king's presence much of the time. Naturally he would become a friend of the king. I think that many times when the king had to make a decision he would ask his cupbearer, "What do you think about this matter?" In time the cupbearer became sort of an advisor, a member of the king's cabinet. Probably because of his job Nehemiah stayed in the land of his captivity, hoping that someday he might be able to use his position to help his people. Maybe that is why he asked his brethren how things were in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah is preparing to make a request of the king, but he is not quite ready. On this particular day he does not feel well. Since he received the bad news about the Jews in the land, he has been fasting, mourning, and praying. I think his eyes were red. He did not look his usual happy self. Never before had he looked sad. Usually he was a bright, cheerful fellow. The king noticed that Nehemiah was not himself.

Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid [[Neh. 2:2](#)].

Nehemiah did not know that his feelings showed. He had tried to conceal the way he felt but apparently was not able to. So the king asked him a point-blank question, "Why are you sad? You are not physically ill, so it must be sorrow of heart. Something is troubling you. Tell me what it is." At the king's question Nehemiah became very much afraid.

And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? [[Neh. 2:3](#)].

Nehemiah said, "Let the king live for ever." The cupbearer could always say that wholeheartedly since he tasted what came before the king! He hoped the king would stay in good health, and he hoped he would also.

Then he blurted out what was troubling him, "Why shouldn't I be sad, O king, my master? The city of my fathers and the sepulchres where they are buried lie in waste and the gates are consumed with fire."

Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven [[Neh. 2:4](#)].

This is the first verse in this book where the word so occurs, but it will occur thirty-two times. Nehemiah uses this word as a shortcut to get around a lot of protocol and flowery verbiage that does not mean anything. You will find that this man gets right to the point. He does not beat around the bush. He said, "So I prayed to the God of heaven" -- right in the presence of the king. The king had said to Nehemiah, "You evidently want to make a request of me. What is it that you want to ask me?" So Nehemiah shot up a prayer to the God of heaven. It was a brief prayer and I think it was something like, "Oh Lord, help me say the right thing. I am in a very tight spot!"

And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it [[Neh. 2:5](#)].

Nehemiah asked the king to grant him a leave of absence that he might go to Jerusalem to help rebuild it.

And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time [[Neh. 2:6](#)].

There is a reason for that parenthetical insertion: "(the queen also sitting by him,)." Not only was Nehemiah a young man, I think he was a handsome young man with a very good personality. I imagine there were times when court business could become quite boring. The king would become involved with some petty political matter and would have to settle it with a great deal of discussion. The queen would become bored and start a conversation with the cupbearer. She might have said, "Where did you go this weekend?" And Nehemiah would say that being a Jew he went to the synagogue on Saturday. Then on Sunday he took a little trip in a boat up the Euphrates River and did a little fishing. The queen and Nehemiah probably had many conversations along this line.

So when Nehemiah asked the king for permission to return to the land, the queen probably nudged the king in the ribs and said to him, "Let him go if that is what he wants to do." The king thought about it for a moment and then asked, "For how long shall thy journey be?" The king probably started to say, "This is a busy season. It is going to be difficult to get along without you, Nehemiah. I don't know if we can spare you or not." About that time the queen nudged him and said, "Let him go." Finally the king asked, "How long will this take and when will you return?" Obviously the king liked Nehemiah,

too, and he wanted him to come back. At this point Nehemiah could have gone into detail but he does not. He simply says, "So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time."

There is a lot of wasted verbiage today. The other day I listened to a television program concerning the work of one of our government committees which was hearing witnesses concerning a certain matter. A certain lawyer was speaking. I listened to him for fifteen minutes -- and he could have put his entire testimony in two sentences. He certainly did string it out. He took advantage of the fact that he was appearing before this committee and that he was being televised. He used a great deal of excess verbiage. Nehemiah did not waste words. He got right to the point.

Moreover I said to the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah [[Neh. 2:7](#)].

Nehemiah realized that his trip would be a difficult one through dangerous country. He asked the king for letters of introduction and explanation to the governors along his route so they would give him protection as he traveled through their lands.

And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me [[Neh. 2:8](#)].

Now Nehemiah trusted the Lord, but as a government official he didn't mind asking the king for his official assistance and protection along the route.

Nehemiah's Review Of The Ruins Of Jerusalem (2:9-16)

Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me [[Neh. 2:9](#)].

It looks as if half the army of Persia accompanied Nehemiah on his journey. God had opened the heart of the king to protect Nehemiah, and he knew that the hand of God was upon him. He went on his journey well protected. You remember that when Ezra had asked the king for permission to return to the land, he wanted to ask the king for protection; but he had been so eloquent in telling the king how God would take care of him and lead him that he was ashamed to ask for an escort. He was afraid the king would say, "Aren't you trusting the Lord?" Nehemiah, however, felt that he had the right to ask for protection because he was a government official.

Friend, God is not going to lead all of us alike. He led Ezra one way, and he led Nehemiah another way. He will lead you one way and He will lead me another way. I made a mistake at the beginning of my ministry by trying to imitate a certain preacher. He was highly successful and a great man of God. One day an elder of my church, who had known me ever since I was fourteen years old, said, "Vernon, I want to have lunch with you." I went to the bank where he was vice president, and from there we went to his club for lunch. All he said to me as we sat there was, "You know, we would rather have an original Vernon McGee than an imitation anybody else." That was all he said and that

was all he needed to say. From that day to this I have not tried to imitate anyone. And Lord help the man who would try to imitate me! What a tragic thing it is for one man to try to duplicate another man. God will not lead us alike. Ezra went back to the land with no support whatsoever. Nehemiah returned to the land with half of the Persian army. God will use both ways.

When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel [[Neh. 2:10](#)].

When Nehemiah reached his destination, there was already opposition. There are three fellows we are going to meet. There is Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, whom we will meet later on. These three men were the enemies of God and His people. They had tried to hinder the building of the temple, and now they want to hinder the rebuilding of the wall. When Nehemiah came with a tremendous entourage of servants and soldiers, everybody in the country heard of it. They wanted to know who in the world he was. They were told that he was cupbearer to the king of Persia, and that he was coming to help the Jews. When that word got around, the enemy was grieved. They didn't like that.

It is always interesting to see how news is received. It usually depends upon who you are whether news is good or not. The gospel is not good news to its enemies. In fact, it is anything but good news.

So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days [[Neh. 2:11](#)].

In this verse we note the word so again. At this point Nehemiah could have written two or three chapters about his journey to Jerusalem and the thrilling experiences he had on the way. Instead he simply says, "So I came to Jerusalem." Mark it down every time he uses the word so. He is cutting down on a great many words.

And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon [[Neh. 2:12](#)].

After arriving in Jerusalem Nehemiah did not want to stir up undue alarm, so he went out at night under the cover of darkness to make his inspection and see what the real condition was. He had no entourage of servants with him. It was no parade. He was a layman -- this is the way a businessman would do it.

And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire.

Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass [[Neh. 2:13-14](#)].

There was so much debris that Nehemiah could not ride horseback through it. He had to dismount.

Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned [[Neh. 2:15](#)].

Nehemiah had circled the entire city. He was finished with his inspection.

And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work [[Neh. 2:16](#)].

Nehemiah used caution and good judgment in doing God's work. I love to see certain laymen today who are doing things for God. If I may be personal, we have here in California a group of men who comprise the "Thru the Bible Radio" Board. They meet regularly and they are always a great encouragement to me. I am no businessman and, very candidly, I need advice. It is marvelous what these men do. I just listen to them as they discuss certain things. Every once in a while one of them will take me to lunch and say, "Now look, here is something I think is important as far as the radio ministry is concerned." It is usually something I have never thought of before. Now this man Nehemiah intrigues me -- I am anxious to follow his story through and see what action he will take.

Nehemiah's Encouragement To Rebuild The Walls (2:17-20)

Now having made the proper survey and evaluation of the work to be done, he called a meeting.

Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.

Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work [[Neh. 2:17-18](#)].

Nehemiah called a meeting of the leaders in the surrounding area of Jerusalem. He told them how God had led. He told them about his leave of absence and why he had come to Jerusalem. He had already made his inspection. He knew what the situation was and he said to the group, "Let's do this job. God is with us." They all responded to his enthusiasm and said, "Let us rise up and build."

Nehemiah was a real leader, a God-inspired leader. The leaders responded to this man. Again here is his familiar word so. "So they strengthened their hands for this good work." He could have elaborated a great deal and told us how this group gathered together and responded to his leadership, but Nehemiah did not do that. He is a very modest layman who stays in the background.

But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to

scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? [[Neh. 2:19](#)].

Here is the enemy -- three men. This is not a nice little trio to have around you, friend. I suppose that every man of God not only has wonderful men around him, but he also has a few like Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian. The enemy will use different methods to try to discourage you. Generally, ridicule is the first method the enemy tries.

When I was converted, I worked in a bank and I had gone the limit into sin, I must confess. I was in grave sin. I shall never forget the reaction when I made the announcement that I was resigning and that the Lord had called me into the ministry. I did not know anyone could be ridiculed like that. I remember how discouraged I was when I left that place. I felt like giving it all up and going back and saying, "Look fellows, I was kidding you. I just want to come back and be one of you again." But I soon found that I was frozen out. I had lost a lot of my so-called friends. It was during the days of prohibition, and they were only interested in drinking rot-gut liquor and running around. I went back to school and, oh, how discouraged I felt. The enemy started out by using ridicule. He doesn't do that to me anymore. That is the first phase of the devil's warfare against you, friends. He will have folks make fun of you as a Christian. At times you will find the going extremely rough. It was true of Nehemiah. The three leading enemies used the weapon of ridicule at first to deter the people from attempting the herculean project of rebuilding the walls and gates.

Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem [[Neh. 2:20](#)].

Notice what happened. I cannot help but love Nehemiah, and I hope you do too. He said, "Get out of my way. We are going to work. God is with us in this." How wonderful -- and God was indeed with them.

Chapter 3

THEME: Rebuilding the walls and the gates

This chapter brings us to the rebuilding of the walls and gates. It was one of the greatest building projects ever undertaken. What Nehemiah did was a tremendous thing. It was a wonderful way in which God was moving. You see, God had led Ezra and Zerubbabel back to the land to rebuild the temple. Their task was a different one from Nehemiah's. He was a layman, and his work was to rebuild the walls and gates of Jerusalem. God accomplishes His work in different ways with different men. God always moves like that, friend.

Many of us in the ministry started out trying to imitate someone. Well, it doesn't work. We just have to be ourselves. Have you ever noticed what God can do with one nose, two eyes, one mouth, and two ears? He can make a billion faces, and no two of them will be alike. He certainly can come up with a variety of faces. He also makes an infinite number

of fingers and no two fingers are alike, and the fingerprints are all different. God does it like that because He wants each of us to be himself.

The story of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem is given to us in a most wonderful way. Ten gates tell us the story. It begins with the sheep gate and ends with the sheep gate. Sometimes the question is asked, "Were there other gates in the wall of Jerusalem?" I do not think there were at that time, although there could have been. These ten gates were selected to tell the story of the gospel. They give God's plan of salvation. I have written a booklet entitled *The Gospel in the Gates of Jerusalem* which goes into more detail concerning these gates.

Sheep Gate (3:1-2)

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel [[Neh. 3:1](#)].

At the sheep gate is where it all began. This is the gate where the Lord Jesus entered into Jerusalem. We have on record one occasion when He came through this gate and came to the pool of Bethesda ([John 5:2](#)). Frankly, I think He used the sheep gate to enter Jerusalem every time until His triumphal entry -- when He entered through the east gate. There are those who make the mistake of identifying the east gate with the golden gate. I have heard people say that because the east gate is sealed up today, it will not be opened until Jesus Christ comes through it. The east gate is not the golden gate; the golden gate is the gate that leads to the temple. That is the gate which will be opened for Him and which will lead Him right into the Holy of Holies.

The sheep gate is the gate through which the animals were brought for sacrifice. This is the gate our Lord used. I think He was acting out, as it were, a walking parable. He was illustrating what John the Baptist said about Him, ". . . Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" ([John 1:29](#)). He is the Lamb of God in His Person and in His work. He takes away the sin of the world. Therefore, the sheep gate symbolizes the Cross of Christ. This is where you begin with God. The Cross is the only place you can begin with God. God does not ask us for anything until we come to Christ and accept Him as Savior. God has only one thing to say to the world and that is, "What will you do with My Son who died for you?" Not until you answer that question will He ask you about your life and your service. If you turn Him down and you do not want to accept His Son, then He does not ask you for anything. He doesn't want your good works, nor does He want your money. He does not want anything from you. Instead, He has something to give you. His Son died for you. It is the sheep gate which sets that concept before us. It all begins at the sheep gate.

And next unto him builded the men of Jericho. And next to them builded Zaccur the son of Imri [[Neh. 3:2](#)].

Jericho is the place of the curse, and its men worked right next to the sheep gate. That is interesting to me. The men of Jericho came up to Jerusalem from down in the Jordan valley. They built right next to the sheep gate. If you came around the Mount of Olives

on the road to Jericho, you would be at the place where these men worked. The pinnacle of the temple and the temple area is at that spot.

Jericho is the city upon which a curse was pronounced. Joshua said, ". . . Cursed be the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho . . ." ([Josh. 6:26](#)). In the days of Ahab there was a man who rebuilt this city, and the curse came upon him and his sons. It was the city of the curse.

You and I live in a world today that has been cursed by sin. I don't have to labor that point -- all you have to do is look around you. Man has gotten this world in a mess! Man just does not seem able to solve his problems. There are non-Christian men in high places who are saying that the problems today are beyond the solution which man can offer. We live in a cursed world. Only Christ's death on the Cross can remove the judgment of sin from your life and my life, because ([Ezek. 18:4](#) tells us), ". . . the soul that sinneth, it shall die." My friend, that is a judgment on you. It is a judgment on me. Christ can bear that for you because of His death on the Cross. If you have not trusted Him, you can trust Him now.

Fish Gate (3:3-5)

Next we come to the fish gate.

But the fish gate did the sons of Hassenaaah build, who also laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof [[Neh. 3:3](#)].

It was to this gate that fish were brought in from the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. There were many fish eaters in those days. The fish gate was one place you would not have any problem locating, friends. Your nose would lead you right to it. Now, what does the fish gate symbolize? Well, the Lord Jesus said to the men who followed Him, ". . . I will make you fishers of men" ([Matt. 4:19](#)).

After the disciples learned the facts of the gospel, Jesus said to them, "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" ([Luke 24:49](#)). That is, don't go yet. Wait until you are baptized by the Holy Spirit, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and then filled by the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost they were filled, and they became fishers of men. Today that is what God is saying to His own. He is not asking any unsaved man to be a fisher of men. How could He? An unsaved man would not know what God is talking about. But God is saying to His own, "I want you to fish for men."

I believe that we are to fish for men in different ways. I disagree with people who insist that those who fish must go from door to door. I don't think every person can do that. I think there are some people who are called to witness a little differently. For example, prayer evangelism is one way of effectively reaching people today. We all have different gifts; God made all of us differently. There are different ways to spread the gospel. However, I am of the opinion that all of us need to go through the fish gate one way or another. You should have a part in getting out the Word of God. Jesus says, "I want you to follow Me, and I'll make you a fisher of men."

When we come to [Nehemiah 3:4](#), we begin a list of individuals who worked to rebuild the walls. It is wonderful that their names have been recorded in the Book of Life. To read this section is an exercise in pronunciation. Frankly, you cannot be dogmatic about the pronunciation of these names. You can follow a self-pronouncing Bible, but no one can guarantee its accuracy. However, these individuals are known to God. They helped build the walls of Jerusalem. Someday they are going to be rewarded for their labor.

And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord [[Neh. 3:5](#)].

These nobles thought they were too good to do this type of work -- or perhaps they had some other excuse. You suspect that they had lily-white hands and would not think of lifting stones to repair the walls of Jerusalem. My friends, if you have seen the stones in the walls of Jerusalem, you marvel at the work which individuals must have put forth to build them, and maybe you have a little sympathy for the nobles of the Tekoites. They just would not put their necks to the work. It took a lot of manpower to move those stones. It took a lot of grunting and groaning to build those walls. This work created a lot of sore backs, sore hands, and sore feet. In fact, a person was sore all over from this hard labor. However the nobles were shirkers and fell down on the job.

It is interesting to note that the nobles were right next to the fish gate, which speaks of witnessing. These men were not witnesses for God at all. I don't know about you, but I would not want to be in that group. I would hate to have it reported in the eternal Word of God that I did not do what He called me to do. In our day I am afraid that there are many people in the church who are not doing what God has called them to do. I am talking about saved people, not the unsaved. These Christians are not doing anything. They are not serving God. In [Proverbs 11:26](#) it says, "He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him. . . ." Corn represents the Word of God, and it is a terrible thing to hold back the Word of God from those who are hungry. Have you ever stopped to think about that? Read this verse carefully: "He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him. . . ." We are also told that there will be certain people in eternity that will rise up and call an individual blessed. I think there will be people in hell that will rise up and curse some folk who are in heaven because they withheld corn from them. Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." If we are going to be in His will today, somewhere along the line we are going to have to become involved in a movement that is getting out the Word of God to hungry hearts. None of us can do it alone. It must be a team effort.

Old Gate (3:6-12)

Next we come to the third gate that is mentioned. It is the old gate.

Moreover the old gate repaired Jehoiada the son of Paseah, and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah; they laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, and the locks thereof, and the bars thereof [[Neh. 3:6](#)].

I asked a friend the first time we visited the city of Jerusalem and saw the gates, "Which one is the old gate? They all look old to me." The old gate is one that has been there from the very beginning. [Jeremiah 6:16](#) tells us the message this gate has for us: "Thus saith

the LORD. Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. . . ."

We are living in a day where people are interested in the thing that is new. They must have the latest model automobile, the latest fashion, and the latest thing for the house. One day a man whose fetish was to have the latest style in clothes said to me, "I notice that you are wearing a narrow lapel, and today it is the style to wear a wide lapel." The lapel on a coat does not make any difference to me, but it does make a great deal of difference to many people. Concerning my home, another man said to me, "You have an old place, don't you?" My home is about twenty-five years old, and I still think of it as new. In the south I lived in a house that was one hundred years old, but in Southern California my house is already old. We are living in a day when things are changing radically and rapidly. The conditions under which our grandfathers proposed to our grandmothers were vastly different from those under which young folk in this present day deal with the matter of marriage. Morality is changing. People talk about "new morality," but it was old even in the time of Noah.

It is this constant search for something new that is leading us to frustration. It is the thing that has taken many folk down the garden path to a dead end street with no purpose in life whatsoever. Jeremiah says that we need to ask for the "old paths," because there we will find rest for our souls. Instead of running to psychiatrists and trying this and that new method, what we really need to do is come to the One who says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" ([Matt. 11:28-30](#)). My friend, in Christ we find rest. The human heart needs something greater than this mechanical, electronic, push-button age in which we live. We need to get back to the old paths.

Next unto him repaired Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, of the goldsmiths [[Neh. 3:8a](#)].

Does this impress you as being unusual? The stones in the walls of Jerusalem, as I have said, were tremendous; their weight was enormous. Now the goldsmiths were accustomed to sitting at benches and working with little pieces of gold. They were not used to working with large stones. Although it was hard work for them to rebuild the wall, they did it. God took note of that and recorded what the goldsmiths did. In our day there are folk who are making real sacrifices for God and it is difficult for them. Remember, my friend, God takes note of it.

Next unto him also repaired Hananiah the son of one of the apothecaries, and they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall [[Neh. 3:8b](#)].

An apothecary is a druggist. They are the pill-rollers. They don't make pills any larger than you can swallow; yet these folk were working with great big stones. These men were really rock-and-rollers now! God took note of them also and recorded it in His Word. I like to see people today who are really putting their necks to the work, those who have to grunt and groan in the Lord's work and are really doing something for Him.

I know several pastors, real men of God, who are killing themselves in the work of the Lord. I had a wonderful friend in Southern California who had a heart attack and died. He was a man of God, and he actually killed himself in the work of the Lord. I know of others today who are doing the same thing. I said to a pastor up north, "Look, brother, I know something about what you are going through. You are overworking. You are doing too much. You have to slow down." My friend, if you have a good pastor and he is working too hard, go to him and put your arms around him (I hope that won't give him a heart attack!), and tell him you are praying for him. He may be one of the goldsmiths or the pill-rollers. Tell him not to overwork. Men of God are needed today.

And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Halohesh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters [[Neh. 3:12](#)].

You ought to take note of this. We have the women's liberation movement today, and they had it in Jerusalem during Nehemiah's day. They said, "We are going out and help build the walls of Jerusalem. Men do it. We are going to do it too." Apparently Shallum the son of Halohesh did not have any sons, so his daughters went to work helping him build the walls of Jerusalem. God took note of it and recorded it.

Valley Gate (3:13)

The valley gate repaired Hanun, and the inhabitants of Zanoah; they built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and a thousand cubits on the wall unto the dung gate [[Neh. 3:13](#)].

The valley gate is the one that led out of the city of Jerusalem down into the valley -- it could have been on any side of the city, because you have to go down into a valley to get out of Jerusalem. This is the gate through which many of us are called to go.

When I think of this gate, I think of the valley of the shadow of death. All of us are walking in that valley. David spoke of it in [Psalm 23](#). As you walk down that canyon, it keeps getting narrower and narrower until -- if the Lord doesn't come -- you will walk out right through that gate.

This gate also has a practical side. It is the gate of humility, the gate of humbleness. God sometimes has to lead us through trials and difficulties in order to teach us some lessons. We are told that faith develops in us different virtues, and one of them is lowliness of mind. In the Epistle to the Colossians it is called ". . . humbleness of mind . . ." ([Col. 3:12](#)). This is something that you cannot cultivate in your own human strength.

Humility has to come from the inside. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. I am reminded of the man who said to his friend, "I have been trying to be humble and at last I have succeeded." The friend said, "Well, I know you are proud of that." The man replied, "I sure am." Humility is not attained by human effort. We have to be humbled by the Spirit of God.

The story is told about a minister in Scotland who while in seminary was the leading student in his class. Once during his student days he was invited to preach in a certain church because of his fine scholastic record. Since he was a star pupil, he entered the pulpit with great pride. When he stood before the congregation to preach, it was

confusion. He found out that it was easy to put a sermon on paper in his study, but to get up and deliver it was another thing. He became frightened. He forgot everything he knew. He left the pulpit at the close of the sermon in great shame and humility. A dear little Scottish lady had watched his every action and met him as he left the pulpit. She said, "Young man, if you had only gone into the pulpit as you came down, you would have come down as you went up." God has put us in the school of humility. Humility is a fruit of the Spirit. The valley gate is one that many of us need to go through.

Dung Gate (3:14)

But the dung gate repaired Malchiah the son of Rechab, the ruler of part of Beth-haccerem; he built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof [[Neh. 3:14](#)].

This is an important gate for the health of the city, but not much is said about it. Today the dung gate leads to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, but in Nehemiah's day it was located at the southwest angle of Mount Zion. The dung gate was where the filth was carried out, where the garbage was taken away. In [2Corinthians 7:1](#) Paul says, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Paul dealt with this subject in the Christian life as much as any other. You and I need to recognize that we need to confess our sins to God. Honest confession is the means by which we get out the garbage. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" ([1John 1:9](#)).

Gate Of The Fountain (3:15)

But the gate of the fountain repaired Shallun the son of Colhozeh, the ruler of part of Mizpah; he built it, and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and the wall of the pool of Siloah by the king's garden, and unto the stairs that go down from the city of David [[Neh. 3:15](#)].

I believe that the gate of the fountain refers to what our Lord meant when He said to the woman at the well, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" ([John 4:14](#)).

At the Feast of Tabernacles Christ stood up and said, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" ([John 7:38](#)). In the next verse John explains His statement: "(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)" ([John 7:39](#)). In [Romans 8:9](#) Paul says, "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." The gate of the fountain, therefore, teaches the fact that every believer is indwelt by the Spirit of God, and that he needs an infilling of the Spirit. When a believer is filled with the Spirit, he is not just a well, but a fountain of living water which will gush out to be a blessing to other people. All of us should be a blessing to others in these days in which we live.

Water Gate (3:26)

As we read down through this chapter, we come to the seventh gate.

Moreover the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel, unto the place over against the water gate toward the east, and the tower that lieth out [[Neh. 3:26](#)].

The water gate was the gate used to bring water into the city. An aqueduct brought some water into the city but not all of it. The remainder was carried in through the water gate.

What does the water gate have to say to us? I believe it symbolizes the Word of God. When we get a little farther along in this book, we will see that it was here that Ezra put up a pulpit. When Ezra erected a pulpit at the water gate, he read from the Word. The place he chose was symbolic; it was no accident. The New Testament makes this clear when it speaks of the washing of water by the Word. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" ([John 15:3](#)). In His prayer in [John 17:17](#) the Lord said, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." The water gate pictures the Word of God. We are washed by the water of the Word. It is through this gate that we are trying to spread the Word. We all need to be water boys, helping to bring the water to those who are thirsty.

The psalmist asked the question, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" How is he to get clean? "By taking heed thereto according to thy word" ([Ps. 119:9](#)). The startling thing about the water gate is that it was not repaired. Apparently when the other gates and walls were torn down, the water gate remained intact. That was unusual. It did not need any repairs at all. Does that tell you anything? The Word of God, friend, does not need any repairs. It is intact.

There are many people today who try to prove that the Bible is the Word of God. There are also those who try to prove that the Bible is not God's Word. My ministry at the beginning was an apologetic ministry. I tried to prove that the Bible was the Word of God. I learned, however, that I do not need to prove it; I am to give out, and the Spirit of God takes care of that. I have already come to the definite, dogmatic conclusion that the Bible is indeed the Word of God. I don't think it is -- I know it is. And I know what it can do for you today. Therefore it does not need my weak support. The Bible will take care of itself.

When I first became a pastor in downtown Los Angeles, California, the late Dr. Bob Shuler was still pastor of the Trinity Methodist Church. He said to me one day, "You don't need to defend the Word of God. It will take care of itself. It is like having a lion in a cage in your backyard. You don't need to have guards protect the lion from the pussycats in the neighborhood. You just open the door and the lion will take care of himself. He will also take care of the pussycats." The Word of God is like that today. It needs to be given out. It does not need any repair, certainly not my weak repair. All the Lord asks me to do is to give it out.

Horse Gate (3:28)

From above the horse gate repaired the priests, every one over against his house [[Neh. 3:28](#)].

Now the horse was an animal ridden by a warrior. [Zechariah 1:8](#) speaks of a man riding upon a red horse. Behind him there were red horses, speckled, and white. [Revelation 6:4](#) says, "And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword." These symbolic horses are powers making war.

The Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a little donkey. He was not meek because He rode upon that animal; it was the animal ridden by kings. It was not considered a humble little animal in that day. Men only rode horses during a time of war. The horse was the symbol of war.

The horse gate speaks of the "soldier service" of the believer today. In [Ephesians 2:6](#) Paul tells us that God has ". . . raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." That great truth is in the first part of the book. In the second part of Ephesians we are told to ". . . walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" ([Eph. 4:1](#)). Our heads are up in the heavenlies, but our feet are down here on the ground where we have to walk. Not only that, in [Ephesians 6:11](#) we are told to "put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." There is a real battle to be fought. It is a spiritual battle. [Ephesians 6:12](#) continues: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." We are not fighting against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces in this battle. As I write this, there is an increasing interest in the Word of God. There are also a great many adversaries. Paul said the same thing in his days: "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" ([1Cor. 16:9](#)).

I never realized that certain folk were my enemies until I began to give out the Word of God. It is amazing that you can be attacked by certain men who ought to support God's Word. These men claim to be Christians, and you would think that if they didn't have something good to say, they wouldn't say anything; but they have been very critical of my Bible teaching ministry. Because there are many adversaries, we need to put on the whole armor of God. And we are told to take the sword of the Spirit. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. That is the only weapon we want to use.

In [2Timothy 2:3](#) Paul said to a young preacher, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." This verse speaks of the fact that as believers we are going to have battles to fight. If you are not in a battle today, apparently you are not standing for the Lord, because the battle is waxing hot in many places. If you take a stand for the Lord, somebody is going to try to cut you down. Many of God's children are having a real struggle in this hour in which we live.

East Gate (3:29-30)

After them repaired Zadok the son of Immer over against his house. After him repaired also Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the east gate [[Neh. 3:29](#)].

The next gate we come to is the east gate, a gate that fills us with anticipation and excitement. Obviously, this gate was located on the east side of the city. It was the first one that was opened in the morning. The east gate in modern Jerusalem is sealed. There

are those who seem to think that it is the gate through which the Lord Jesus Christ will come when He returns to earth. He may do that, but Scripture does not say that He will. Scripture indicates that He will enter through the golden gate, which is not in the wall of the city but in the temple.

Although the east gate is now sealed, it was the first gate opened each morning, because it was facing in the direction of the rising sun. All during the night the watchman was on the wall, walking up and down, making his rounds. Early in the morning he comes around to the east gate and watches the horizon for the first sign of daybreak. Perhaps there were people in the city who were disturbed that night, fearing there might have been an enemy out in the darkness, and they could not sleep. Maybe they paced up and down most of the night. Finally they ask, "Watchman, what of the night? Isn't it ever going to end?" The watchman replies, "Well, it is still dark out there, but the morning is coming." After a while there is that glimmer of light in the eastern horizon. Finally the watchman gives the signal and says, "It is light out here; I can see that there is no enemy. And the sun is coming up." What a sigh of relief goes up from that city!

We as believers ought to be gathered at the "east gate" because there is a glimmer of light on the horizon -- the sun may be coming up before long. But before the sun comes up, the Bright and Morning Star will appear. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" ([1Thess. 4:16-17](#)). This event is what we call the Rapture. "Caught up" is a translation of the Greek *harpazo*, and one of the synonyms is the word *rapture*. When someone says that the Bible does not teach the Rapture, they are just arguing semantics. The Scripture says that He is going to take His own out of the world before the sun comes up. And there is a little glimmer of light today. I have no date to suggest concerning the time of the Rapture. Unfortunately, there are men today who are saying that between now and B.C. 2000 the Lord will come. I would like to know where they get that idea. They act as if they have a private line to heaven that the rest of us do not have access to. Scripture tells us, however, that our Lord is coming, and I believe that the next event is the Rapture of the church. We ought to be gathered at the east gate my friend, in this day when it is so dark. It is comforting to know that there is a little glimmer of light, and we have a hope.

After him repaired Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, another piece. After him repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah over against his chamber [[Neh. 3:30](#)].

This verse is interesting in that all this man Meshullam did was repair the part over against the chamber where he lived. My friend, you may not be able to witness to the world; you may not be able to reach your neighborhood; but you can reach your family. You can give the Word of God to your family. It is wonderful to have a saved family, and it is your responsibility to get God's Word to them. One man said to me concerning his family, "I feel I should get them saved." I disagree with that. His business was to see that they heard the gospel. Then their decision was between them and the Lord. Meshullam just repaired over against his chamber. Apparently that was all God expected him to do, and He recorded it.

Gate Miphkad (3:31-32)

After him repaired Malchiah the goldsmith's son unto the place of the Nethinims, and of the merchants, over against the gate Miphkad, and to the going up of the corner [[Neh. 3:31](#)].

What is the gate of Miphkad? Miphkad means "review" or "registry." When a stranger came to Jerusalem, he had to have a visa -- not like those we have today, but he had to stop at this gate and register. It was also a gate of review. When the army had been out fighting a battle and returned, they passed through this gate. It was here that David reviewed his soldiers returning from battle. How he loved them, and how they loved him! Most of them would gladly have laid down their lives for him. When they passed through this arch, David was there to thank his battle-scarred men for their unselfish loyalty and daring.

As we saw in [1Thessalonians 4](#), at the time of the Rapture we are going to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Some people say, "Oh, that is going to be wonderful." Well, it is. But did you know that after the Rapture we are going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ? "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" ([2Cor. 5:10](#)).

This is not the same judgment as that at the Great White Throne mentioned in [Revelation 20:11-15](#). Only believers will be present at the judgment seat of Christ, because this judgment does not concern salvation but reward. Believers will receive rewards for things done in the body. You will not be there if you are not saved. You will be rewarded according to what you have done, whether it be good or bad. And Paul says, on the basis of that, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men . . ." ([2Cor. 5:11](#)). In effect, Paul says, "I want to keep busy because I am going to have to turn in a report about whether I am working eight hours a day, or if I am giving the Lord sixty minutes in every hour, twenty-four hours every day, seven days a week." Under the Law the Jews only gave God one day, but our Lord says that regardless of what we do, we are to do it unto Him. He does not care if we wash dishes or dig ditches. Someone has said, "You can dig a ditch so straight and true that even God can look it through." And He is going to "look it through" someday, my friend. He is going to take a close look at how you lived down here. That is the picture of the gate Miphkad. David knew his battle-scarred men and what they had done. Every once in a while he would call one out of the ranks and say, "I have a reward for you." There are going to be many unknown Christians who will be called out before the judgment seat of Christ and rewarded. We think of the preachers, the missionaries, the officers of the church, and the Sunday school teachers receiving great rewards, but I think that some of the greatest rewards will go to some of the unknown saints who live for God in this day. Miphkad can be a wonderful gate for you and me to come to someday. The prospect of it should cause us to examine our lives a little more closely.

And between the going up of the corner unto the sheep gate repaired the goldsmiths and the merchants [[Neh. 3:32](#)].

We have been through ten gates, and now we are back at the sheep gate. We have been all of the way around the walls of Jerusalem, and we are right back where we started. As

you will recall, the sheep gate symbolizes the Cross of Christ. We began with the Cross of Christ and we end with the Cross of Christ. It is Christ's Cross that is all important.

As we stand at the sheep gate, I would like to tell you the story of the late Dr. MacKay, the great Scottish preacher who was holding meetings in London. After a service a young man came to him and said, "Dr. MacKay, I would like to speak to you for a moment." Dr. MacKay replied, "Well, I must take the train back to the place where I am staying, but you may walk with me to the train." On the way as they walked, the young man said, "What you say about trusting Christ is not clear to me." Dr. MacKay went over the plan of salvation once again, but the young man said, "I am sorry, but I cannot seem to feel that I understand savingly. It does not seem to get through." The preacher heard his train coming and he asked the young man if he had a Bible. He said, "No, I don't." Dr. MacKay said, "Here is my Bible. Take it and turn to [Isaiah 53:6](#) and read that verse. When you come to the first 'all' you bend down low and go right in there. Then, when you get to the last 'all' stand up straight and you will come out right." So the young man took his Bible and Dr. MacKay rushed down to get his train.

The young man stood there holding the Bible, a little puzzled. He moved over under a street light and turned to [Isaiah 53:6](#). Now what did he say to do? He said at the first "all" to bend down low. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way. . . ." The young man thought, That sure is a picture of me. He continued to read the verse: ". . . and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." He stood there puzzled. Oh, yes, I am to stand up straight and come out. I see it now. I am to trust Christ. The Lord God has laid all of my sins on Jesus. Now I can stand up straight -- He has forgiven me!

The next evening Dr. MacKay arrived early and sat on the platform looking for the young man. The service started and he had not located him yet. He had his Bible and, after all, Dr. MacKay, being Scottish, was not about to part with that Bible. Finally he saw the young man come in, and Dr. MacKay went to meet him and get his Bible. He said, "Young man, did you do what I said?" The lad replied, "Yes, I did. I read [Isaiah 53:6](#). I bent down at the first 'all' and stood straight up at the last 'all.' " Dr. MacKay asked, "And what happened?" The lad replied, "I know now that Jesus is my Savior and I have trusted Him."

My friend, we begin at the sheep gate, and we come out at the sheep gate. I think that throughout eternity we are going to talk about the sheep gate, where Jesus died over 1900 years ago for your sins and mine.

Chapter 4

THEME: Nehemiah's response to opposition from without

In the preceeding chapter we saw that Nehemiah -- an ingenious fellow -- used a special strategy to get the wall around Jerusalem built. As we moved around the wall, we saw that different people were allocated a certain section of wall to repair so that the wall was going up all the way around the city at the same time. In this chapter we will see that they managed to build it about halfway up. The enemies found that the weapon of laughter did

not stop the work, so now they are going to employ a new method to try to stop the building.

But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we build the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews [[Neh. 4:1](#)].

Laughing at them hadn't stopped them -- the work progressed -- so now the enemy will use the weapon of ridicule before others. They mock that which was precious to God but despised by Sanballat.

And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? [[Neh. 4:2](#)].

The questions which the enemy asked were pertinent questions. They were questions the children of Israel were asking themselves. They wondered if they would be able to complete the task. Ridicule is one method the enemy will use.

Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall [[Neh. 4:3](#)].

Tobiah the Ammonite -- he is a wisecracker -- comes through with a sarcastic remark. It had a touch of humor in it, by the way. Now a fox is a very light-footed animal. A fox can walk over ground and not leave much of a track. A fox can run on a wall and not disturb a thing on it. What Tobiah is saying is that these feeble Jews are building a wall that even a light-footed fox would knock down. After all, some of the builders were goldsmiths, druggists, and women. My, how the enemy ridiculed them! Believe me, this was discouraging for these people who had been working so hard.

What is Nehemiah going to do? The resource and the recourse of this man is prayer. Notice what he does.

Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity:

And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders [[Neh. 4:4-5](#)].

These men who tried to hinder the building were God's enemies as well as the Jews' enemies. This is a prayer under the Law. Under the Law, the Jews had a perfect right to ask for justice. They were correct to ask that a righteous judgment be made. God intends to do that, friend; that has never changed.

However, the Lord Jesus Christ has reversed it for those of us who are believers today. Today we are told not to pray for revenge. We are definitely told in [Ephesians 4:32](#), "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." In [Romans 12:19](#) Paul wrote, "Dearly beloved, avenge not

yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." There are certain matters that we should turn over to the Lord and He will handle them. If we attempt to handle them, it means that we are not walking by faith.

There are certain things that I think we are to take care of. It is quite evident from Scripture that there are times when a rebuke should be given. We find that Paul told the Corinthians that they were to deal with the things in their church that were wrong. Paul told Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" ([2Tim. 4:2](#)). Reprove means "to convict." Rebuke means "to threaten." Exhort means "to comfort." The child of God is to use the sword of the Lord, which is the Word of God. That sword needs to be pushed into that thing which is corrupt and wrong in our lives. It is also to be used to apply the balm of Gilead to a broken heart. There are times when a rebuke should be delivered. God help the preacher who is not faithful in that connection. We are living in a day when people grasp to themselves teachers with itching ears. They want a flowery message that just washes itself out into nothing. They don't want to hear a message that deals with their indifference and the sin in their lives. As a result, a great many churches -- even some so-called Bible churches -- have nothing to offer but that which is sweet. While it is true that there is a lot of Scripture that is sweet, there is some of God's Word that is bitter. Many people feel that the bitter side should not be heard.

Under Law, my friend, the people could pray that justice be brought to pass upon their enemies. We need to remember that those who are the enemies of the people of God are also the enemies of God Himself.

However, the life of God's people is not simply a life of prayer; it also is a walk and a warfare. So what did these people do?

So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work [[Neh. 4:6](#)].

Nehemiah ignored the sarcasm of the enemy, prayed to God, and continued to build. So the opposition of ridicule was overcome by the people.

But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth [[Neh. 4:7](#)].

When the enemy saw that laughing at them and ridiculing them are not going to stop the building of the wall, they begin to move in another direction. They are angry now.

And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.

Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them [[Neh. 4:8-9](#)].

Once again we see that prayer is Nehemiah's resource and recourse. His motto is now "pray and watch." "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God." It is fine to use

pious platitudes when we back them up with something. I know many people who will say, "Let us pray about it." Have you ever heard someone say that? What I want to know is, what are you going to do after you pray? When I was a pastor, I asked a man to do something. He said, "Well, I will pray about it." I replied, "Wait a minute. If that is your way of saying no to me, say it right now to my face, and I will find someone else to do it. I don't think you need to pray about this matter. Either you will or you won't. Which is it?" To tell the truth, he wouldn't do it. He was just putting me off, and our conversation enabled me to find someone else for the job. There are many people today who simply mouth pious platitudes.

Nehemiah could have uttered a pious platitude. He could have said, "We are trusting the Lord. We won't do anything." That is the easy way out. That is what many people are doing today. They say they are trusting the Lord, but what are they doing about it? If you really trust the Lord, you will be doing something. Nehemiah knew that the enemy was plotting to come against him, so he set a watch. This is what God expected him to do, of course.

Not only was there trouble without; there was trouble within.

And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed,
and there is much rubbish: so that we are not able to build the wall
[[Neh. 4:10](#)].

This is the time to be careful, because the Devil can hurt you most severely from the inside. One of Satan's greatest weapons against God's people is discouragement.

I received a letter some time ago from a young missionary couple serving in the jungles of South America. It was their first term of service, and they were very discouraged. From their letter it sounded as though they were ready to come home. They said, "You do not know what it means to us to listen to your radio program late at night down here in this foreign land, among people whose language we do not yet understand." The Devil, of course, was using his weapon of discouragement.

We, too, were discouraged and were ready to take our program off that particular station in South America. Then the Lord undertook in a marvelous way, and we were able to continue broadcasting the program. We were so glad, because we know the Bible teaching is an encouragement to these young folk. Oh, how wonderful the Lord is to us, friend! The Devil uses discouragement in all our lives.

And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we
come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the
work to cease.

And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them
came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall
return unto us they will be upon you [[Neh. 4:11-12](#)].

The enemy took advantage of the Jews' discouragement, and they planned a surprise attack. "We are going to take them when they are not looking for us."

What will be Nehemiah's strategy against a surprise attack?

Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows [[Neh. 4:13](#)].

Nehemiah put every man in the position where he could defend his own family, which made him more comfortable when he was building, of course. With his family at home, some distance away from him, a builder did not know whether or not they were safe. So Nehemiah put them with their families and armed them well.

And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses [[Neh. 4:14](#)].

"Remember the Lord" was to be their motto, their rallying cry. As you may remember in the Spanish-American War, our nation's battle cry was "Remember the Maine." In World War I it was "Remember the Lusitania." In World War II it was "Remember Pearl Harbor." Napoleon always reminded his soldiers of some past history to stir them up to fight. When Paul the apostle wrote his swan song to a young preacher named Timothy, he gave him a rallying cry. The correct translation of [2Timothy 2:8](#) is, "Remember Jesus Christ!" That is the rallying cry of believers today. "Remember the Lord" was the rallying cry for the Jews in Nehemiah's day.

And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work [[Neh. 4:15](#)].

The Jews could go back to work now. the enemy had retired. They found they could not surprise the Jews.

Nehemiah is an ingenious fellow. He still has more strategy. I like him -- I wish I had him around today.

And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah.

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon [[Neh. 4:16-17](#)].

I love this. Each builder had a trowel in one hand with which to build, and in the other hand he carried a sword with which to defend himself. These two weapons or instruments should be in the hands of believers today. The trowel represents the fact that believers should build themselves up in the most holy faith. That is for the inside.

I disagree with folk who say that when a person is saved he should jump right in and start witnessing. I really don't think new converts ought to be used in a ministry. They first need to learn from experience that Jesus saves and keeps and satisfies. It is wonderful to hear that So-and-So was saved yesterday, or last week; but let us hear from him in a year

or two years from today to see if he has been built up in the faith. You see, we need to be built up. The trowel needs to be in our hand. Also we need to hold the sword of the Spirit. That is also important. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God with which we defend ourselves. We need the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other.

Spurgeon put out a magazine years ago called The Sword and the Trowel -- I think it is still in existence. I was in Spurgeon's church some time ago and stood in his pulpit. What a great man of God he was, and an example of one who believed that you ought to hold the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other.

For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.

And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another.

In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us [[Neh. 4:18-20](#)].

Nehemiah said, "I will watch. When you hear the trumpet, come to that spot, and we will meet the enemy head on."

So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared [[Neh. 4:21](#)].

I don't know what union these men belonged to, but they certainly worked longer than eight hours. They worked from the rising of the sun until the stars appeared in the sky. Believe me, they were tired and weary in the work of the Lord.

Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day [[Neh. 4:22](#)].

To men who had come from far away places, like Jericho, Nehemiah said, "Stay close by, because we want you to be ready to guard at night."

So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing [[Neh. 4:23](#)].

I was just about ready to say to Nehemiah, "Boy, I'll bet you got dirty during all that time." But Nehemiah says, "Of course when we took a bath we took off our clothes." (You see, there is humor in the Bible, friend. Even in a crisis like this, the Lord inserted a little humor.) Otherwise they never removed their clothes -- day or night. They were on guard all of the time. Oh, to be so clothed today with the armor of God!

There are trying times ahead. Real difficulty is going to arise which will cause Nehemiah to become angry and which almost disrupted the work of the Lord.

Chapter 5

THEME: Nehemiah's response to opposition from within

While engaged in this important project of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah has been met by opposition in many forms. My, the devil is subtle. First the enemy laughed at the Jews. Then the enemy ridiculed them. Finally there was open opposition. It was so intense that Nehemiah had his builders put a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other hand while they worked on the wall. Nehemiah and his associates worked so hard that they did not take their clothes off except to bathe.

Now we see opposition coming from within. This is where the Devil strikes his greatest blow. In the history of the church we have seen that when the Devil could not destroy the church by persecution, the next thing he did was to join it! The Devil had already caused discouragement among the Jews, and now he goes a step farther and causes conflict within.

And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews.

For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live.

Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth.

There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards [[Neh. 5:1-4](#)].

Human nature really does not change. Even though we are living in an electronic, mechanical, technological, and space age, problems are about the same as those during Nehemiah's day. I think that all of our technical devices merely multiply our problems and make them very thorny and difficult to solve. Because the Jews were so busy building the walls, they did not have the opportunity to carry on their personal business. They had to buy corn -- food for their families, and in doing so they had to mortgage their property. Some of them had to mortgage their property in order to pay their taxes -- taxes were high in that day. They were borrowing money from their own brethren.

Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards [[Neh. 5:5](#)].

For a long time this problem had been growing, but up to this time Nehemiah did not know about it. These folk wanted to build the walls of Jerusalem, so they very quietly mortgaged their property to their brethren. There were those who were in the lending business, you see.

The foes outside had not been able to harm as long as there was love and harmony within, but now there is conflict. This problem had also come into the early church, you remember. Ananias and Sapphira had conspired to deceive their brethren and were judged by God with sudden death. Their conspiracy had to do with money. I do not know why money is such a temptation, but it is.

I am well acquainted with a church that has been giving out a false financial statement for some time. The old bromide "figures don't lie, but liars will figure" is still true. There is a certain way that even a CPA can present a financial statement that looks good, but in reality the whole truth has not been told. That happens in many churches today. That is the way the Devil gets into churches. I have always noticed that he comes in this way. This is what Nehemiah had to deal with.

The Scripture gives us some advice in [Philippians 1:27-28](#): "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God." The word conversation in this passage means "your way of life." Paul says, "You let harmony be inside. Be honest in your dealings. Don't give false reports or belittle a brother. Tell the truth. When you tell the truth, it will produce harmony." Good old practical James had something to say about this subject, too, in [James 3:16](#), which says, "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." That is what happened with Ananias and Sapphira. They lied about their dealings with the church and brought in confusion. In Nehemiah's day some Jews had borrowed money. When they couldn't pay back the money, they actually had to sell their sons and daughters into slavery. It was only for a certain period of time, but long enough to wreck their lives in some cases. Those who had borrowed money were charged interest. We always think of "usury" as excessive interest, but it really means regular interest. The interesting thing is, though it might be legitimate in the business world today to charge interest, it was not legal for the children of Israel to do it. God said that the Jews were not to charge their brethren interest.

Up to this point Nehemiah has kept his cool. He has been able to go right along with his people and be patient with them, but now Nehemiah is angry.

And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words [[Neh. 5:6](#)].

Nehemiah was not just a little angry, he was very angry.

Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them [[Neh. 5:7](#)].

"Then I consulted with myself" -- this is something for him to decide; so he thinks the matter through.

And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer [[Neh. 5:8](#)].

Nehemiah openly rebuked the nobles and the rulers for their actions. Nehemiah exposed those who had done wrong in the presence of the group, which is the right thing to do when such a thing occurs. Also, the church congregation should be warned if there are

those in it who are not being honest in their dealings and are moving in an underhanded way. Evil should be brought out into the open.

Nehemiah exposed the underhanded dealings of his brethren. He was angry. Somebody says, "You should not get angry." Paul says, "Be ye angry, and sin not . . ." in [Ephesians 4:26](#). It depends upon the reason for your anger. If you become angry because of your own personal welfare, it is wrong. If you become angry because God's program, God's glory, and God's name are being hurt, then you can "be angry and sin not." Nehemiah was not quiet about the sin he uncovered. He did not acquiesce. He was not passive. He spoke right out.

We ought to be stirred up to a righteous anger when we see something wrong in the church. We should not mollicoddle the wrongdoer and shut our eyes to his sin. Many people say, "We just don't want to disturb things." You don't? My friend, you had better do something because the Devil has moved in on you, and he will divide you. We need courage today. We need conviction. The church no longer has a good name in the world, and the world is passing it by. The spiritual movement that is emerging is largely outside the organized church. Christians have been playing church. The controlling group in the church has been having a good time, but they are not reaching the lost, and the world is passing by uninterested.

A preacher in the North said to me, "It makes me angry to think that you cannot reach out and touch the lost today because they know about the hypocrisy, the pious platitudes, and the dishonesty inside the church." But there are those in the world who are longing to know the truth. They want to know if we are being honest in what we have to say. Some of the brethren deal with wrongs in the church by sweeping them under the rug with the excuse that they want to maintain a "Christian" attitude by being sweet and nice. That's not acting like a Christian -- it is acting like a coward!

Nehemiah brought the sin of his brethren right out into the open and nobody was able to answer him. They had to keep quiet while he was there, but they will cause all the trouble they can. They are also going to cause Nehemiah a lot of trouble when he goes back to the palace in Shushan. Nevertheless, he rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, and he served God in his day and generation.

Also I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of our enemies? [[Neh. 5:9](#)].

Christ is a reproach today in the world. Is He a reproach because of the conduct of the church? Because of the conduct of believers? Because of the conduct of you and me? This is a question we need to ask ourselves. Nehemiah said, "Look, you are causing the enemy to blaspheme because of what you are doing!"

I likewise, and my brethren and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury [[Neh. 5:10](#)].

Nehemiah said, "I was in a position where I could have benefited financially." This was the real test of Nehemiah. He did not use his position for gain. In our society the grasping

person is after the last farthing. Many a man is putting the dollar ahead of God. You can put a dime so close to your eye that you cannot see even the sun. There are many folk looking at the world like that.

Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them [[Neh. 5:11](#)].

Nehemiah appealed to the wealthy Jews to restore what they had collected and not to collect any more payments.

Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise [[Neh. 5:12](#)].

I love this fellow Nehemiah. He says, "I don't believe your verbal promises. I want you to sign on the dotted line." Although they were God's people, He knew better than to take them at their word. They had to put their oath in writing.

I think one of the biggest mistakes I ever made in the ministry was to believe some Christians. I hate to say that, but I say it from experience. We should be able to trust the word of a Christian. An outstanding Christian businessman -- whom I know to be honest -- said to me, "McGee, I have gotten to the place where I don't even like to do business with Christians. I would much rather do business with the man in the world because I automatically watch him. But the Christian -- I assume he will be honest, but that is not always the case."

Nehemiah was a practical man. He said, "All right, you have promised to return what you have taken. I don't believe you. Sign on the dotted line. That is what I want you to do."

Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the LORD. And the people did according to this promise [[Neh. 5:13](#)].

I think that if something as strong as this statement of Nehemiah's were read from the pulpit in our day, the congregation would say, "Amen." It takes just one bad apple to spoil the whole barrel of apples. One skunk in a field full of cats will give them all a bad name. It would be well to mark out the man who is causing trouble, to get the bad apple out of the barrel, and remove the skunk from the field of cats. This is what Nehemiah did. He actually pronounced a curse upon them. What a picturesque scene! What a dramatic scene! Nehemiah "shook out his lap." Remember that he was a government official and wore a uniform. He shook out his long robe in front of the crowd and said, "This is the way God will shake you out, and I will shake you out, if you don't make your promises good." That is the way to talk to people like this! To the Galatians ([5:12](#)) Paul could say, "I would they were even cut off which trouble you." He wished the legalizers would be absolutely cut off because of the damage they were doing to the Galatian believers. This is strong language!

Now we will be given a glimpse of the personal life of Nehemiah.

Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor [[Neh. 5:14](#)].

He had a right to draw a salary, but he did not.

But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God [[Neh. 5:15](#)].

The governors before Nehemiah received their salaries, but Nehemiah chose not to accept a salary. I love this man!

Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work [[Neh. 5:16](#)].

Nehemiah did not go into the real estate business. He stayed out of land speculation. He gained no mortgages on land by lending money or grain. He did not take anything on the side.

Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us [[Neh. 5:17](#)].

He regularly entertained one hundred fifty table guests. He also entertained Jews from surrounding nations who had come to live in the city but had not yet found a place to live. Apparently he did all of this at his own expense. He was different from the other governors.

Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people [[Neh. 5:18](#)].

He did not demand the governor's food allowance, because he had a heart for his hardworking brethren.

Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people [[Neh. 5:19](#)].

He was a wonderful man. His concern was for his people, but they would forget him. It is a sad thing, but many a famous person has learned that the world forgets. People have short memories. But Nehemiah asked God to remember him. He said, "Think upon me, my God." How wonderful to know that, while God does not remember our sins, He will always remember our good works. And He even records them in a book!

Chapter 6

THEME: Wall finished in spite of crafty opposition

We have seen that Nehemiah encountered just about every form of opposition imaginable in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Satan has thrown in his pathway many things from his bag of tricks to cause him to stumble and fall and fail in his endeavor. Satan does the same thing to us today, only many times in our experience he succeeds and we fail. God does not want us to fail. In fact, He has made every arrangement so that we do not need to fail -- yet we do. But Nehemiah did not fail.

In this chapter we find that the wall is about finished.

Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) [[Neh. 6:1](#)].

Notice the honesty of this man. He adds, "Though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates." Nehemiah is like Nathanael because there is no guile in him whatsoever -- he is not being subtle or clever. Unfortunately, there are many people in their church work who don't tell you everything they should tell you about certain matters. Many times their reports are not full and complete. They are slanted. They are built up and filled in, and the entire truth is not told.

I have always appreciated honesty in my doctor. The first thing he told me when he suspected that I had cancer was, "Dr. McGee, I am going to tell you the truth because, if I don't, you won't have confidence in me." From that day to this, he has laid it on the line. When there didn't seem to be any hope for me, he told me the plain facts. He did not attempt to paint a rosy picture. He did not attempt to cover up. He told it like it was. I have always appreciated it. Honesty is something that is badly needed in business, in social gatherings, and in the church. Of course we should not be blunt or crude. If you are introduced to a lady, you don't have to tell her that she is beautiful if she is not. You can't kid her anyway -- I think she knows. We simply need to be more honest in our dealings with one another.

Now when the enemy, Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and others hear that the wall is completed, Nehemiah honestly admits the report is a bit exaggerated. The gates are not set up. The honesty of Nehemiah is a tremendous thing. He tells it like it is.

That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief.

And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? [[Neh. 6:2-3](#)].

The enemies now reverse their tactics. Since they could not stop the work, they now propose to get together with Nehemiah and work out a compromise. Their intention is not

to promote the welfare of Nehemiah. This is the old satanic method of "When you can't fight them, join them." Today it is called the Ecumenical Movement.

The place they were going to meet was on the plain of Ono. Nehemiah properly turned down their invitation. He said, "Oh, no," to Ono because "they thought to do me mischief." They were plotting against him, probably planning to slay him. There was no use going into great detail with the enemy; he simply sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." The enemy wanted to compromise, but Nehemiah said, "No!"

There are those in the church today who want to compromise. They feel that you are bigoted and dogmatic if you don't meet with them and try to work out a compromise. I quit meeting with folk like that a long time ago. Today I meet only with those who want to meet around the person of Christ. You would be amazed at some of the churches in which I have held meetings. Although I am in total disagreement with the organizations and some of their doctrines, I will meet with anybody around the person of Christ, but I am not prepared to meet with the enemy at all.

Looking back a few years, I believe William Jennings Bryan made a big mistake in meeting Clarence Darrow in Cleveland, Tennessee, to debate the subject of evolution. I think Bryan walked all over Darrow. Any unbiased person who reads the debate will have to come to the conclusion that Bryan was on the winning side, but I believe that the very fact that he met with Darrow was wrong. It was really a losing battle, and it has certainly been demonstrated since then that it was. You cannot win over an enemy by meeting with him like that. That is my conviction.

Although I am an ordained minister, I don't belong to any denomination or organization. As a result, I can meet with any person or group who believes the Word of God, believes in the deity of Christ, and believes that He died for our sins -- regardless of the label they use. It makes no difference to me. But I do not meet with the enemy. Nehemiah was doing a good work, and he did not have time to come down and waste his time with the enemy. God's people do not need to compromise. Nehemiah had an uncompromising attitude, and I admire him for it.

Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort: and I answered them after the same manner.

Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in hand [[Neh. 6:4-5](#)].

The enemy was persistent. He always is. Did they really want to be friendly and compromise with Nehemiah? The fact of the matter is that Nehemiah's presence was desperately needed in Jerusalem in order to complete the building of the wall. The letter from the enemy was couched in polite language, but it was a hook with bait on it. Notice that it contained a threat.

Wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words [[Neh. 6:6](#)].

Old Gashmu is ever with us. He is the fellow who is the worst gossip of all. I have discovered that sometimes the worst gossip is a man and not a woman.

This letter -- accusing Nehemiah of attempting to rebel against Persia and set up a separate state -- was made public, either by being posted or by being read aloud. It was designed to discourage those who were working on the wall. It accused Nehemiah of wanting to become king.

And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together [[Neh. 6:7](#)].

Not only did they accuse him of claiming kingship. They also accused him of hiring prophets to support what he said! These were awful things to circulate about Nehemiah. The letter indicated that they wanted to find out if these things were really true because they were going to report it to the king. They are exerting pressure on Nehemiah to meet with them.

Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart [[Neh. 6:8](#)].

Nehemiah's reaction to the enemy was, "You actually did not hear the things you are accusing me of; you made them up yourself." This was a nice way of calling them liars.

For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands [[Neh. 6:9](#)].

In facing this problem, Nehemiah went to the Lord. He said, "The enemy is doing this to weaken me and to hinder your work. Strengthen my hands."

Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee.

And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in [[Neh. 6:10-11](#)].

Shemaiah, a false prophet, pretends to have a great interest in Nehemiah's safety. He says he wants to reveal a plot against the governor's life. The temple was the only place where Nehemiah would be safe. He is asking him to do a cowardly thing. What he did not reckon on was Nehemiah's spiritual insight.

And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear [[Neh. 6:12-14](#)].

Nehemiah is in the thick of plots and schemes to destroy him. Well, he dealt with this crowd that pretended to be his friends, but he is still in a difficult spot. He is caught between a rock and a hard place. He turns around and finds himself in the middle of another plot, but he turns to God. The land was once again cursed with false prophets. It seems that they were the most determined enemies of God's servants.

So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days [[Neh. 6:15](#)].

Without fanfare of trumpets, great ceremony, or ribbon cutting, the wall is finished.

And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God [[Neh. 6:16](#)].

The work was finished in fifty-two days. Only God could have done this through them. But even though the wall is now completed, there is still danger.

Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them.

For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.

Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear [[Neh. 6:17-19](#)].

The enemy still persists in his opposition by circulating letters to the nobles of Judah. Tobiah had evidently married a daughter of one of the nobles! All of this time there was this playing "footsie" with the enemies of God. Tobiah had a "telephone" right into the walls of Jerusalem so that everything Nehemiah did or said was reported to Tobiah. Also, "they reported his good deeds before me." That is, these kinfolk by marriage would come to Nehemiah and say, "Nehemiah, you are too hard on Tobiah! He is really a lovely gentleman." Then they would begin to tell of his good works. "And uttered my words to him" -- they were acting as liaison officers, which means they were a bunch of tattletales. Everything Nehemiah would say, and all that went on in Jerusalem, was reported to Tobiah. And "Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear." Tobiah would respond with threatening letters.

Chapter 7

THEME: Nehemiah's register of the people

As we begin this chapter, we see that the wall has been completed. Now the people begin to protect the city of Jerusalem. Many of the homes have already been built, but inside the city there is still much work to be done. They are still clearing out the debris. It is necessary to protect the city because the enemy that tried to thwart and hinder the rebuilding of the walls would now like to destroy the city.

Now it came to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed [[Neh. 7:1](#)].

After the wall was finished, Nehemiah set the doors at the different gates, and then he appointed these men to protect the city. The porters were the watchmen. They were the ones who took care of the wall. They were on guard duty all around the wall, letting those on the inside know what was going on outside. If an enemy or some danger approached, they would sound the alarm. They watched both day and night -- it was a twenty-four-hour job. The standards for this job were high, but we will find that some of the rules that were set up were not enforced as they should have been. The guards of the wall were not to be indifferent to who came and went inside the city walls.

At this point I want to say something that I trust will not be misunderstood. We are told today that we are not to be indifferent to those who come and go in our fellowship, because we are not to fellowship with all who are professing Christians. Notice what Paul says in [1Corinthians 5:11](#): "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." Today, although we are to give doctrine top priority -- for instance, we cannot make those who deny the inerrancy of Scripture our brothers and fellowship with them in worship -- Paul is not dealing with doctrine when he says we are not to keep company with one who is a fornicator. He is talking about that man or woman in the church who will not deal with that sin in his or her life. Fellowship has been based on doctrine. We break fellowship with those who do not agree with us on doctrinal issues. But Paul is stating here that conduct is a basis for breaking fellowship -- as well as doctrine.

There was a preacher in Southern California who got into trouble on a morals charge. He moved to another area and the same thing happened. Yet the people in his new church had been warned about him. They had been willing to overlook his sin because his doctrine was right. His conduct about wrecked the church -- in fact, it almost wrecked two churches. We seem to have a lopsided view. We emphasize doctrine, and that is as it should be; but what about morals? When Paul writes not to keep company with a brother who is a fornicator or covetous, he is not referring to doctrine. What about a man who is money-hungry? What about a man who is not honest in his dealings? Are we to have fellowship with him?

Let us also understand that breaking fellowship with another believer on a point of doctrine does not mean that we are to sit in judgment upon him. To a young preacher Paul writes: "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" ([2Tim. 2:19](#)). You don't know and I don't know who are really

God's children, but God knows His own. You and I are not called upon to carry a crusade against them, because God will judge them. We are just to break fellowship with them: we are not to sit in judgment upon them. The point is that we as believers are to be on our guard. An apt motto for us is: Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

In addition to appointing porters to guard the city of Jerusalem, Nehemiah appointed singers. I am not in that group, I can assure you. In the next chapter we are going to find Nehemiah saying, "The joy of the LORD is your strength." The spirit of praise is the spirit of power. This means that we should be a rejoicing group of folk, but joy is often absent from the contemporary church. It is not made up of a happy group of people. Oh, they will laugh at a good story and enjoy a banquet, but Bible study is not a joy to them. If you could stand where I have stood for many years, you would see how apparent this is in the faces of the congregation. The troublemakers in the church are generally the ones who do not enjoy Bible study.

In [Ephesians 5:18-19](#) Paul describes the mark of a Spirit-filled Christian when he says, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Although I can speak, I can't sing. However, I can sing in my heart. If I have any music in me that is where it is -- it has never come out. But my heart does sing at times, and I often long to be able to sing with my voice also.

The word psalms in this verse means "to praise." Oh, how sweet is the name of Jesus. The word hymn means "to ascribe perfection to Deity." Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts. This is what we are to sing about -- how wonderful He is! This will bring joy into your life.

I was sitting in the study of a fellow pastor some time ago and noticed this motto on his wall: "Joy is the flag that is flown in the heart when the Master is in residence." When you are walking in the will of God, and you are in the center of His will, and you are having fellowship with Him, you will have joy in your life. How wonderful it is!

Having porters and singers made for a great city, but that is not all. Levites were also appointed. They were ministers. God calls ministers. [Proverbs 18:16](#) says, "A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men." How true that is. If God has called you to be a minister, He will make room for you. That is, He will give you a place to serve.

That I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many [[Neh. 7:2](#)].

Hanani was not Nehemiah's blood brother. You will recall, at the beginning of the Book of Nehemiah, that while he was serving in the court of Artaxerxes one of his brethren from Jerusalem came and told him about the condition of the Remnant that had returned. He was one of Nehemiah's fellow-Israelites rather than a blood brother. Hanani apparently was one of the leaders in Jerusalem, and it had been he who informed Nehemiah as to the conditions in Jerusalem, as we read in chapter 1. So Nehemiah already knew this man. That is why he said, "I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the

ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem. . . ." Did Hanani receive this position because he was an educated man and had been to seminary? Is that the way your Bible reads? Well, mine does not read that way either. He was one of the men placed in charge over Jerusalem because he "was a faithful man, and feared God above many." He was "faithful," not "educated."

I wish I could get this point over to our seminary students today. Now don't misunderstand what I am about to say. We need an educated ministry. The desire for an educated ministry was the origin of our school system in the United States. Education is necessary, but it is possible to go to seed in that direction. There are many men in the ministry who lack character -- yet they are educated. Someone has made the statement, "You can even educate a fool." That is true, and there are many educated fools in this world, not only in the ministry but everywhere else. But the thing that God wants is faithfulness. In [1Corinthians 4:2](#) Paul says, "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." Can your pastor depend on you? Can your fellow Christian depend on you? Are you faithful? Education is profitable if you are faithful. It is not worth anything if you are not faithful.

And I said unto them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar them: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one to be over against his house [[Neh. 7:3](#)].

Each entrance to the city was to be watched during the day. At night, when anything could happen, all were to maintain watchfulness. Each one was to watch at least his own household. So God holds us responsible for at least our own households. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" ([Mark 13:37](#)). That should be the attitude of each believer.

Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded [[Neh. 7:4](#)].

Not all of the building inside was completed at this time. It was possible that a man might become interested in building his own house and forget to watch. The whole spirit of building the walls and gates had been with the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other. My, how we need both of them in the Lord's work today!

The remainder of this chapter is a genealogical record.

And my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and found written therein,

These are the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city;

Who came with Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah.

The number, I say, of the men of the people of Israel was this
[[Neh. 7:5-7](#)].

This is the same genealogy as found in Ezra, the second chapter. Why in the world would God waste so much printer's ink and give us the same genealogy again? I will tell you why. The Word of God says, ". . . the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance" ([Ps. 112:6](#)). God says, "I know these folk and I want you to know that I know them." He has listed their names in one place, then made a carbon copy. I have been told that in some of the bureaus in Washington they make fifteen copies of everything, and God has His carbon copies also. It is as though God says, "You may not find these names interesting, but I do. These are My folk." This genealogy is just a leaf out of God's memorial book. There are quite a few genealogies found in Scripture. In [Genesis 49](#) the twelve tribes are listed. In [2Samuel 23](#) we find the list of David's mighty men. The first few chapters of 1 Chronicles are lists of names. [Nehemiah 3](#) gives us another listing. [Romans 16](#) is made up of a roster of names. [Hebrews 11](#) also lists those who were faithful. These are just names to us, but God remembers each person and records his name in the Lamb's Book of Life.

The children of Azgad, two thousand three hundred twenty and two
[[Neh. 7:17](#)].

Who in the world was Azgad? He was a man who was carried away in the Babylonian captivity. During the seventy years, plus a few more, his family had been multiplying. There were 2,322 descendants and each one of them could say, "I am related to Azgad." When one was challenged to prove he was an Israelite, he could say, "Azgad was my great-great-great-great-great grandfather. I know who I am."

There are people today who say, "Well, I think I am a child of God. I hope I am a child of God." My friend, you can know that you are a child of God. [1John 5:12](#) says, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." If you have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have Him and you have life. If you don't believe what He says, then you are calling Him a liar. If you have put your faith in Christ, you have life on the authority of God's Word. And God has written it down. The son of Azgad could say, "I know who I am. Look here, my name is written down."

And these were they which went up also from Tel-melah, Tel-haresha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer: but they could not shew their father's house, nor their seed, whether they were of Israel [[Neh. 7:61](#)].

There were those who could not prove they were Israelites. They said, "We think we are Israelites. We hope we are. We try to be." Thinking, hoping, and trying to be Israelites did not make them such. It did not help them. They had to know who they were. When they could not show their genealogy, they were put out.

These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood [[Neh. 7:64](#)].

They could not declare their genealogy. You not only need to be saved, you need to know it, my friend.

And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim [[Neh. 7:65](#)].

The discerning of the priesthood in that day was by the Urim and the Thummim in the breastplate of the priest. It was the way in which the high priest ascertained God's will. It was God's provision in that day, but today we determine God's will through His Word. And it tells us how we can have eternal life.

So the priests, and the Levites, and the porters, and the singers, and some of the people, and the Nethinims, and all Israel, dwelt in their cities; and when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities [[Neh. 7:73](#)].

This is the last verse of the chapter. The children of Israel are back in the land now. Under the leadership of Nehemiah a tremendous work has been done. But his work is not finished. There is more to do.

Chapter 8

THEME: Great Bible reading led by Ezra

In the previous chapter we saw that, after Nehemiah had made adequate preparations to guard the city, he appointed singers. He wanted Jerusalem to be filled with the joy of the Lord. Then he conducted a great Bible reading, which was essential to revival.

And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel [[Neh. 8:1](#)].

Ezra is called to bring forth the book of the Law of Moses. There is going to be a great Bible reading.

And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month [[Neh. 8:2](#)].

Notice that only those who could "hear with understanding" gathered. That means there must have been a nursery for the crying babies. Maybe Nehemiah took care of them, I don't know; but proper preparation was made so that those gathered would be able to concentrate on what was being read.

And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law [[Neh. 8:3](#)].

I don't know where I could find a congregation who would listen to me read from the Bible from "morning until midday" -- I always had trouble getting them to listen for forty-five minutes. Their impression of my sermons was similar to that of the two little old ladies who were walking out of church one Sunday morning. One of them said, "My,

that preacher certainly preaches a long time." Her friend replied, "No, he really doesn't preach a long time, it just seems like a long time!" To most people forty-five minute sermons seem like a long time. These Israelites who gathered to hear God's Word read were really interested, however. They had been in captivity for seventy years and had never before heard the Word of God. It was a new experience for them.

And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam [[Neh. 8:4](#)].

With Ezra stood these thirteen men.

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up [[Neh. 8:5](#)].

When Ezra opened God's Word, everyone stood up, and they remained standing throughout the reading. While they listened from morn to midday they did not have soft-cushioned pews upon which to sit.

First of all there was praise to God.

And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground [[Neh. 8:6](#)].

This means that the people went down on all fours and touched the ground with their foreheads. That is the way they worshiped in that day. "And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God."

Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their places [[Neh. 8:7](#)].

Here is another list of very important individuals. These are the men who will explain God's Word to the assembled people.

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading [[Neh. 8:8](#)].

This great assembly of all the people was gathered by the water gate inside the walls of Jerusalem. The men mentioned in [verse 7](#) were stationed throughout the crowd. Ezra, the scribe, would read a certain portion of the Law and then he would stop while each of these men stationed out in the congregation would ask his group, "Did you understand what was read?" Probably most of them nodded in the affirmative. Maybe some of them raised their hands and said, "We do not quite understand what that means." So the man assigned to his group would explain that portion of the Law to them. Then Ezra would

read another section of the Law. Then he would stop while the people would ask questions, and their teacher would answer them.

I wonder what would happen if we had a great Bible reading in our churches today. Someone could stand up and read God's Word. You could have people stationed throughout the congregation to explain any questions that might arise from what was read. Suppose the first chapter of Ephesians was read. You would not have to read very far before a real problem would appear. [Ephesians 1:4](#) says, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. . . ." This would raise questions right away. What does Paul mean? Is he teaching the doctrine of election? What is the doctrine of election? Perhaps a great Bible reading in our churches would lead to revival. This one in the Book of Nehemiah did.

The reading of the Law, and the asking and answering of questions caused the people to understand the Law. They stood in their places and, when something came up that they did not quite understand, they would have it clarified. I personally believe that the entire Bible should be taught in this way, and that every unclear verse should be explained. I do not agree with this business of taking a text and preaching the gospel from it. That is the reason there has been such a lack of interest in the Word of God. I am not sure but what it is handling the Bible deceitfully to take a text or a theme, then launch out into the deep with no thought of ever coming back to the Scriptures to explain them. I believe God intends for us to read the Bible and attempt to explain it as we go along.

There is another lesson in [Nehemiah 8:8](#). There are many methods used in preaching. There is the psychological approach, and the scholarly approach, and many go off on other tangents. A dear saint said to a president of a seminary that she was listening to me teach the Bible by explaining it verse by verse. He replied in a very casual manner, "Well, that is one way of doing it, I guess, but it certainly is not the scholarly and proper way to preach." Well, that is the way the Lord is leading me to do it, and I believe it is the scriptural method. Here it is: "They read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." We need to understand what God is saying in His Word.

I have occasion to speak in many places, and I have heard the Scriptures read in just about every way imaginable. Every now and then some brother gets up and reads the Word with great emphasis. He reads it as if it is the Word of God. But too often some fellow gets up and ducks his head as he reads so that nobody can hear him past the third pew. Or else he mumbles the words. [Nehemiah 8:8](#) says that the law was read distinctly. That is how God wanted it done. Ezra and the other men did not have a course in homiletics or public speaking, but they believed it was the Word of God, and they read it like it was the Word of God. It is my understanding that this is the way God expects us to conduct a church service. I don't care how loud the soloist sings, or how sweetly the organist plays, or how flowery the message, if the Bible is not read distinctly, and the sense of it is not given so that the people understand, the service is of no avail whatsoever. God wants understanding to come from the reading of His Word.

[And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor](#)

weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law [[Neh. 8:9](#)].

Many of these people had never before heard the Word of God. The clear reading and teaching of the Law caused them to be convicted of sin. It caused a great emotional outburst and the tears of repentance to flow. Possibly it also caused them to weep for joy because they were so moved.

Then he said unto them. Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our LORD: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength [[Neh. 8:10](#)].

This is social service for you. This is the social gospel. My friend, if the Word of God means something to you and you get something from it, it will make you want to go out and do something nice for someone. It will also make you want to do something for God.

They tell a whimsical story in California which is a switch from the Boy Scout doing his good deed by helping an old lady across the street. They say that in one of the retirement areas for senior citizens someone came up with a new type of vitamin which was so effective a little old lady helped two Boy Scouts across the street! My friend, I tell you, the Word of God is a vitamin that will make you do a good turn for someone.

"Send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared." They were to do something for the poor. "Neither be ye sorry" -- rather they were to rejoice because the joy of the Lord was to be their strength. In [Philippians 4:13](#) Paul said to believers, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." In [Philippians 4:4](#) he said, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice." Paul was telling believers that the very source of power was "joy." The secret is prayer, but the source of power is joy. The Word of God should make you joyful. That is one reason why I feel there is something wrong if a church service does not make you happy and bless your heart.

For over a period of twenty-one years in downtown Los Angeles, California, we had the privilege of having what was said to be the largest midweek service in America. Anywhere from 1,500 to 2,500 people attended the class. After the service, I followed the custom of going out on the front porch and shaking hands with the folk as they were leaving. I could always tell whether the Bible study had been a blessing or not. Sometimes folk would come out and sort of mumble as they shook my hand. I could tell right away that it had not been a blessing to them. Then others would be radiant as they shook my hand, and say, "Oh, I am rejoicing in the Lord." And I would know that the Bible study had accomplished its purpose.

The Word of God is supposed to bring you joy. That is one of the reasons John wrote his first epistle. In [1John 1:4](#) he says, "And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." God doesn't want you to have a little fun; He wants you to have a whole lot of fun reading and studying His Word. Studying the Bible ought to bring joy into your life. If it doesn't, face up to it, friend; something is radically wrong with you. You ought to go to God in prayer and say, "Lord, I want your Word to bring joy into my life. Whatever cloud there is, I want it removed that I may experience the joy of the Lord when I study the Word." That will make church-going a really happy affair.

Have you ever seen a crowd going to a football game? My, it is like a holiday, with all of the rejoicing that goes on. Have you ever watched people coming into church on a Sunday morning? Boy, what a duty! What a burden! There are lots of folks with burdens, but the burdens should be lifted in the service. People should come out of the service with joy in their hearts.

And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them [[Neh. 8:12](#)].

I hope this Bible study makes you happy. I read three letters recently. One was from a discouraged missionary to whom the Word of God is bringing joy. Another concerned a home which was about to fall apart. The Word of God brought joy. The third letter was from a man who had bitterness in his heart against me. He apparently was influenced by some people who are my enemies, but the Word of God began to work in his life. The Bible can have an effect on all of us if we will let it.

And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law [[Neh. 8:13](#)].

The initial study of God's Law caused many of the leaders to come to Ezra the following day for more instruction. During Bible conferences I am not much impressed when someone says to me on Sunday night, "This has been a great day. I have been greatly blessed." I look for them on Monday night, and if they don't come, I wonder if they were sincere on Sunday night.

And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month:

And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.

So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim [[Neh. 8:14-16](#)].

This is a celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. The dwelling in booths was to be a reminder to them of the fatherly care and protection of God while Israel was journeying from Egypt to Canaan.

Here in Nehemiah's day they are obeying the Law that had been read to them. They had heard the Word of God and are doing what it commanded. My friend, it is one thing to read and study the Bible and have it bring joy to you, but that joy will end unless you obey what you have read and let it have its way with you.

In the following chapter we will see that the result of this great Bible reading was revival.

CHAPTERS 9 AND 10

Chapter 9

THEME: Prayer and revival

You will recall that while studying the Book of Ezra I mentioned that several books contain a great ninth chapter. Ezra chapter 9, Nehemiah chapter 9, and Daniel chapter 9 -- all have to do with the subject of revival.

Now let us be clear about what is meant by the word revival. It is a word that is greatly misunderstood. It means "to recover life and vigor." It also means "to return to consciousness." It refers to that which has life which ebbs away, sometimes even to death, where there is no vitality, and then it revives. Paul speaks about the resurrection of Christ in [Romans 14:9](#). He says that Christ revived. "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living." This is a good use of the term revival.

Obviously our use of the word revival is confined to believers. It refers to believers in a poor spiritual state who were brought back to vitality and power. Revival is used that way in this chapter. However, I am sure that many of you have discovered that this term has been broadened in its meaning to refer to people coming to Christ. Actually one is dependent upon the other. You can never have a period of soul-winning unless God's people are revived.

In this chapter we will see a period of revival which followed the reading of the Word of God. This reading probably went on for quite a period -- how long I do not know. Ezra the scribe read from the pulpit by the water gate, and the people wept and mourned. Having never heard it before, they were bound to show emotion at the reading of God's Word. It had a tremendous effect upon the people at the time, and it led them to do certain things. They recognized how far short they had fallen from the standard God had set for them. We also saw in the Book of Ezra that it had an effect on Ezra himself. We need to recognize that there cannot be any revival apart from the Word of God. As I have mentioned, Dwight L. Moody thought the next revival that would come after his day would be a revival of God's Word. I wish our contemporary evangelists would pay more attention to teaching the Bible rather than to methods, sentiment, emotional appeals, and the "bigness" which is not necessarily a token of revival.

Notice what God did for these people.

Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.

And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers [[Neh. 9:1-2](#)].

They confessed their sins -- their own and the sins of their fathers.

And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God [[Neh. 9:3](#)].

The Word of God revealed to them their sinfulness. Fasting, sackcloth, and ashes demonstrated their sincerity. Confession and worship followed.

In this day the younger generation is very critical of my generation, and rightly so. If they are returning to God's Word, they will lose their critical attitude and start confessing how much we have failed; but they will first confess their own sins.

You and I are in no position to confess anything until we confess our own sins. If you don't feel that you have any sins to confess, my friend, you need to come to the Word of God. The children of Israel read the Law for one-fourth of the day; then they did something about what they had read -- they confessed their sins. You cannot bring God down to your level. Many people try to do that. Neither can you reach that state of perfection that will raise you to God's level. If you say that you have, then you deceive yourself. I didn't say that; the Bible says it: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" ([1John 1:8-9](#)). If you read the Word of God, you will see that you are a sinner. When you recognize that fact, you will want to confess your sins.

Confession means to agree with God's Word instead of offering excuses or attempting to rationalize our actions. Confession is calling what we are doing or thinking exactly what it is: sin. When we do that we have confessed our sins, and God is faithful and just to forgive us. You will recall that in the Upper Room Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. That is what He is doing today at God's right hand in heaven. He cleanses us. You cannot walk down our streets today without your mind getting dirty, or your eyes getting dirty, or your ears getting dirty. Perhaps even your feet and hands get dirty. So we go to God in confession. After the Feast of the Passover, Jesus rose from supper and began to wash the feet of His disciples. "Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me" ([John 13:8](#)). There are many people attempting to serve God today who are not walking in the light of God's Word. "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" ([1John 1:6-7](#)). It is not how you walk, but where you walk that is important. When you walk in the light of the Word of God, you will see that you fall short of His glory. When you see that, you will come to Him in confession. If you don't, He says to you, "If I wash you not, you have no part with Me." That is, you will have no fellowship with Him. Therefore, the children of Israel spent one-fourth of the day reading the Bible and spent another fourth of the day confessing their sins.

After teaching the Epistle to the Romans, I received about a dozen letters from folk who confessed that they had been talking against me; and one person said that he had hated

me at one time. These people did not need to confess their sins to me, although I do believe that if you have wronged someone, you should talk to them and get the matter straightened out. The point is that the Word of God had an effect on the lives of these people. If it has an effect on you, it will cause you to go to God in confession. This is the road to revival; there is no other road.

Now I believe that after the confession of sin was made (and I think it was private confession), these people straightened out the wrong they had done. On the day of Pentecost Peter did not bring in revival by getting up and confessing how he had denied the Lord Jesus. Dr. Luke and Paul both tell us that our Lord appeared to Simon Peter privately. It was a private matter that had to be taken care of by those involved. You don't take a bath in public; at least I hope you don't. And we are not to confess in public either. It should be a private affair. Simon Peter confessed privately, and I am sure he got things straightened out. Public confession is just a wave of hysteria; it is not revival. It certainly has not brought revival in our day. We need to recognize that we cannot disassociate ourselves from others. Notice that Nehemiah says that when they stood up they confessed and they said, "We have sinned." It is important to see that it was that kind of confession.

Revival begins as an individual affair. There are those who have thought that Charles Finney was on the fringe of fanaticism. I used to think that too, but, after reading what he has said, I have changed my mind. He said that a revival is not a miracle, but the conditions for revival must be met. You can draw a circle, get inside that circle, and say, "Lord, begin a revival in this circle," and that is where it will have to be. After all, Elijah was a one-man revival. And there have been other men who have met these conditions for revival.

These folk met the conditions for revival, and great blessing came.

Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani,
Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and
cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God.

Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah,
Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahia, said, Stand up and
bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy
glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise [[Neh. 9:4-5](#)].

This type of confession will not lead to some public demonstration where the individual gets up, calls attention to himself, and tells everyone what a sinner he is, which makes him very important in the eyes of folk, I have discovered. After hearing the Word of God, they made their confession; then they praised and exalted God. This is what we need to do. How we need to exalt God in our services and praise Him! A pastor was telling me that their midweek service got pretty boring, saying the same prayers every week; so one Wednesday he decided that, instead of making the same old requests, they would praise God! He said, "It almost brought revival." When we begin to praise and exalt the high and holy name of God, it will bring revival.

Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the
heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things

that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee [[Neh. 9:6](#)].

Have you ever stood on the seashore and watched those great waves pound against the rocks? Has it caused you to worship God? Have you had this experience as you stood in a forest? I have walked in the northern woods of Canada -- oh, how thrilling it was! The vaulted ceiling of those tall trees was my temple, and I worshiped God. He is the Creator. He made all of those trees. He made the universe.

Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham;

And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give it, I say, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous:

And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea;

And shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day [[Neh. 9:7-10](#)].

The Israelites praised God because of the way He had led their fathers in the past. They glorified God concerning Abraham and how He preserved him in the land of Canaan. They praised God for the way He brought their nation out of the land of Egypt, led them by miracles through the wilderness, and protected and preserved them.

Have you ever thanked God that you live in this country? My grandfather on my father's side lived in Northern Ireland. He was Scottish and an Orangeman, but he lived in Northern Ireland. The people were fighting, so he moved to this country. I thank God for my grandfather, and I thank God that he came to this land. I don't want to live in Northern Ireland. I don't care how people feel about the old sod over there; I am thankful I am an American. And Nehemiah's people were glad they were Israelites.

They recognize that not only was God their Creator, He was their Redeemer. They are thanking God for the redemption that came to them when He led their people out of Egypt.

These are two things for which you and I are to thank God. He is the Creator; this is His universe. We thank Him for it. Also we ought to thank Him that He saved us; He redeemed us. By the way, have you told Him that you love Him? My, we need to do that! Don't wait until Sunday morning when you are in church to sing the doxology. Right where you are now you can praise God from whom all blessings flow. He is the Creator; He has given me everything that is material and physical. I thank Him for it. Also He has saved me, a sinner! How I thank Him for that. How wonderful He is.

Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them.

For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works [[Neh. 9:34-35](#)].

Look how God blessed the nation of Israel. Yet the kings, princes, priests, and fathers of the nation did not obey God's commandments. God has also blessed the United States. Our forefathers who founded this country certainly believed that the Bible was the Word of God, and they founded our nation on morality. We have much for which to thank God. But they sinned, and we continue to sin. How long will God's patience continue?

Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it [[Neh. 9:36](#)].

The Israelites recognized that the judgment of God was upon them. Will the judgment of God come upon our nation? I don't think we can escape it, my friend.

And it yielded much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.

And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it [[Neh. 9:37-38](#)].

The terms of the covenant will be seen in the next chapter. And each leader of the nation was asked to put his personal seal on this covenant. The people had resolved to obey God's Word.

What kind of covenant have you made with God? I have heard people say that they will not sign any pledge -- not even to give a certain amount of money -- because they might not be able to fulfill it. May I say to you, if you buy a house, or anything on which you are to make payments, they are certainly going to make you sign on the dotted line. I don't know why people can sign up for everything else in life, but they are afraid to sign up with God. My friend, if you mean it, sign up with Him. Oh, how many folk have failed Him, but He is gracious. If we mean business with Him, He means business with us.

Chapter 10

Prayer And Revival (conitnued) (10:29-39)

In chapter 10 we read that the Israelites are making a covenant with God. They are signing on the dotted line. Have you ever made a covenant with Him? Have you ever promised the Lord anything? A covenant is a serious matter, but I believe the Lord likes to know that we really mean business with Him.

In this chapter we find that Nehemiah, the governor, and twenty-two priests are listed first. They sign the covenant. Individual Levites sign the names of their families on the covenant. Also, forty-four chiefs of the people are listed.

They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes [[Neh. 10:29](#)].

Their covenant is to keep the Law, and they list specifically three items to which they covenant. Obviously, they list these because they had not been keeping these items of the Law.

And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons [[Neh. 10:30](#)].

This seems to have been a perpetual problem with Israel. They are now covenanting that there will be no intermarriage with the heathen.

And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt [[Neh. 10:31](#)].

The second thing to which they covenant is that there will be no trade on the Sabbath day or on any of the holy days. Also, the seventh year, which was the year of release in the Sabbatical system, is to be faithfully observed.

The final item to which they covenant is in reference to the firstfruits and provisions for the sacrifices. Let me just lift out excerpts from the remainder of the covenant.

Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God;

For the shewbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering. . . .

And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God.

. . .

And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD:

Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle. . . .

And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil. . .

.

. . . and we will not forsake the house of our God [[Neh. 10:32-39](#)].

CHAPTERS 11--13

Chapter 11

THEME: Reform

Chapter 11 contains another great list which continues into chapter 12. These people were willing to do whatever God wanted them to do. Note the few verses from this chapter.

And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities [[Neh. 11:1](#)].

The people cast lots. One out of every ten persons would stay in Jerusalem. The other nine would move to other cities. I guess the person who drew the shortest straw stayed in Jerusalem, and the other nine went out to make their homes in other places. This could be a situation in which there would be a lot of complaining. It would be a perfect opportunity for people to say, "Why did God let this happen to me? I would rather live in a small town or in the country."

And the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem [[Neh. 11:2](#)].

There were many people who wanted to move out to the suburban areas even in that day. But for those who were willing to dwell in Jerusalem, they just thanked God for them. These folk are strangers to us, but God knew each one; and He records their names because they had willing hearts.

Now these are the chief of the province that dwelt in Jerusalem: but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities, to wit, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants [[Neh. 11:3](#)].

In the following verses are the names of those who were willing to live in Jerusalem. God takes note of the willing heart!

Chapter 12

Reform (continued) (12:27-43)

Chapter 12 continues the list begun in chapter 11. The people listed here are those who just praised God.

Years ago, when I was a pastor in Pasadena, California, I used to visit a lady who was going blind and was partially confined to a wheelchair. You would think this dear lady needed to be helped and comforted. To tell the truth, I don't think she did, but I needed help in those days. I was a young preacher, and I went by to listen to her. Do you know why? She would praise God. My, how she could praise the Lord! Chapter 12 lists those who praised God, and I imagine that her name is somewhere in the list -- we don't have the latest list. God, I am sure, keeps a continuing record.

The bulk of this chapter is devoted to a dedication of the walls of Jerusalem. This was a thrilling occasion!

And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps.

And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi [[Neh. 12:27-28](#)].

They brought together all the musicians. They had a great music festival. Listed here are the names of these inscribed in the Lamb's Book of Life. They are meeting together to dedicate the walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah brought people from all over the land to this dedication because Jerusalem was the city where the temple was.

So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God, and I, and the half of the rulers with me [[Neh. 12:40](#)].

Next Nehemiah lists the priests. They were all there.

Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off [[Neh. 12:43](#)].

The strangers, visitors, tourists, and others passing through that land who heard the great shout of praise and joy probably said, "What in the world is going on over there?" Undoubtedly they went to find out. What a testimony this was to the pagan world around them!

On one occasion when I was in Oakland, California, I passed by a stadium where a baseball game was being played. Someone hit a home run, and a great shout went up from that place. It must have been an exciting game, and I wished that I was there watching it. That was a natural reaction, you see. I thought at the time, My, if I could only get that kind of a shout to go up when I preach, the whole community would hear it, and I have a notion that many people would investigate to find out what caused it.

One of the reasons people pass by the church today is because they think we are a dead and boring lot. And nine times out of ten they are correct. There ought to be more of the joy of the Lord in our services today -- real joy. In the Epistle to the Philippians we will find that the very source of power is joy. And remember that Nehemiah said, "The joy of the LORD is your strength."

If you are a crybaby Christian, you are not going to have much of a testimony. A dear lady once told me, "My husband is unsaved, and, Dr. McGee, I just can't reach him." Then she began to blubber. She continued, "I speak to him at breakfast in the morning, I weep and tell him how much I love him and want him saved." Then again at supper she did the same thing. I got to thinking about that. Would you want to have breakfast and dinner with a weeping woman? I don't know about you, but I would not. It certainly would not help the digestion. I have a notion her husband was plenty sick of it. Later I told her, "I have a suggestion. Why don't you quit talking to your husband at breakfast

and dinner." "Oh," she replied, "You mean I should quit witnessing?" I told her, "Yes, quit witnessing in the way you have been doing it, and start witnessing a new way. Start praying for him. Stop weeping before him -- 'the joy of the LORD is your strength.' "

Chapter 13

Reform (continued) (13:1-31)

In chapter 13 we see again the demonstration that eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. It is the price of Christian liberty and Christian freedom, too.

Somewhere between chapters 12 and 13 Nehemiah returned to his job in the palace at Shushan. Remember that he had only asked for a leave of absence. He had been back in Persia for awhile -- maybe a year or two -- when he asked for another leave of absence so that he could go to Jerusalem. He made a shocking discovery. The people were not keeping the separation that they should have.

On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever;

Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing.

Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude [[Neh. 13:1-3](#)].

The story of Balaam can be found in [Numbers 23](#) -- [Numbers 24](#). The Israelites read the account and decided that the thing to do was to obey the Word of God. They had intermarried with Ammonites and Moabites, which God had forbidden. The children of Israel realized they must put them out of the land.

And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah [[Neh. 13:4](#)].

Oh, oh! Here was the high priest, through the marriage of his son or daughter, allied to the house of Tobiah. The high priest himself had disobeyed God in this important matter of separation. God had strictly forbidden intermarriage with the heathen. God, I think, had given them a very humorous illustration of it; in fact, a real cartoon, which was that they should never plow with an ox and an ass hitched together. You see, an ox is a clean beast and an ass is an unclean beast. They are not to be yoked together. The believer and the unbeliever should not be yoked together, either.

I know a man in business today who is paying an awful price for a partnership that he made before his eyes were opened to this principle. We should not be unequally yoked together in marriage or business.

And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, which was

commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the offerings of the priests [[Neh. 13:5](#)].

The priest had turned over the temple storage room to Tobiah. They no longer brought the offerings of the people to the storage place. Instead they cleaned it out, put down a nice shag rug, some lovely furniture, a king-sized bed, and invited old Tobiah to come in. They told him he could have the room any time he wanted it.

But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king:

And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.

And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber [[Neh. 13:6-8](#)].

All this happened while Nehemiah was away. I love this man Nehemiah. He said, "We are going to get rid of Tobiah. He is not going to be in the house of God!" Remember that our Lord commended the church at Ephesus when He said to them, ". . . thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars" ([Rev. 2:2](#)). So Nehemiah went to the temple, got Tobiah's suitcase, and pitched it out of the window. He said to Tobiah, "You are not staying here any more. You will receive no more free rent."

Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense [[Neh. 13:9](#)].

Nehemiah had the chambers fumigated! Once again the rooms were put into order for their original purpose in the service of God. But Nehemiah did not stop there.

And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field [[Neh. 13:10](#)].

The Levites who served in the temple had not been properly supported; so they had to get a job working in the fields. God's service, therefore, had been neglected. I believe today that many ministers are being asked to do more work than they can handle. Many a minister is having to neglect the study of God's Word because his church wants him to be an administrator and practically everything else. He needs help with the responsibilities of the church so that he will be free to study and pray. I love Nehemiah -- and I think now you will discover why. He said the preacher ought to have a raise. He tells them, "You are going to bring in the tithe that belongs here and see that these men are taken care of who are in the service of God." My! I love a layman like that -- and God approved it, by the way.

Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof [[Neh. 13:14](#)].

Nehemiah asked God to record what he had done, and the Lord did just that; here it is in His Word.

Nehemiah also found out that the people were doing something else -- they were breaking the Sabbath day.

In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals.

There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem [[Neh. 13:15-16](#)].

They came in from the seacoast bringing fish.

Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? [[Neh. 13:17](#)].

The nobles are the ones who permitted this.

Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath [[Neh. 13:18](#)].

Nehemiah reminded the people of God's wrath which had previously been visited upon the nation for doing just what they were presently doing.

And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day.

So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice.

Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath [[Neh. 13:19-21](#)].

Just before the Sabbath, at sunset, Nehemiah commanded that the gates be shut. The merchants came with their wares thinking they could sell them. Nehemiah crawled up on the wall to see if the merchants had come, and there they were waiting outside the gates. They came on the first Sabbath that the gates were closed, and they came on the second Sabbath and the gates were closed. Then Nehemiah told them, "If you come here again, I will come out after you." They knew he meant business, and they came no more.

Now another transgression comes to Nehemiah's attention.

In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab:

And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people.

And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves [[Neh. 13:23-25](#)].

Nehemiah discovers Jews who had married women from heathen nations. Nehemiah "contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair"! When it says that he "cursed" them, it doesn't mean that he swore at them, but that he pronounced a curse upon them. And he made them swear that they would not continue to intermarry with foreigners. He was using extreme measures, but they were needed.

Revival, you see, will always lead to reformation. When there is a revival, everything that needs cleaning up will be cleaned up. The only way that our nation can solve the problems that it faces is by a revival among the people of God.

Nehemiah concludes by saying:

Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.

Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business;

And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good [[Neh. 13:29-31](#)].

These verses summarize Nehemiah's great contributions to the spiritual well-being of his people. All foreigners were removed from positions of honor and responsibility, and the priests and Levites were given back their proper occupations. The offerings for the temple were resumed. Nehemiah's final words are, "Remember me, O my God, for good." Our Lord wonderfully answered his prayer by recording his work in His Word, which is a permanent remembrance. God remembers him for good. And I remember Nehemiah for good. I hope you do, too. He was a great layman of God.

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